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Unpublished stories regarding career development during and
after maternity leave: an analysis of employed mothers in
Ireland

By

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In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Human
Resource Management

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ABSTRACTS

Maternity safeguard is a vital aspect of job quality and gender equality. It is also required for the continuation of social reproduction and economic development. The afflatus of this dissertation is to scrutinise if women's career development has deteriorated at any stage of Maternity Leave in Ireland. The mammoth existing literature and researches are headlining the challenges employed mothers might face on return to work.

Men maintain and enhance their occupations while women take on the primary responsibilities of home and child-rearing; as a result, women are underrepresented in senior executive positions in both Irish and international organisations.

The comprehensive objective of this paper is to dissect if there is a correlation between Maternity Leave and career progression with the focus on women, mainly the age range 30-45 years old, from heterogeneous industries in Ireland. This dissertation will tie in the literature to the subjects and pinpoint challenges that can compromise women's career progression.

RESEARCH STUDENTS DECLARATION FORM

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

H.R. – Human Resource

H.R.M. – Human Resource Management

I.L.O. – International Labour Organisation

M.L. – Maternity Leave

C.I.P.D. – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

C.S.O. – Central Statistics Office

F.W.A. – Flexible Working Arrangements

F.F.P. – Family-Friendly Policies

W.L.B. – Work-Life Balance

W.F.H.– Working From Home

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a fundamental incipit to the research topic. It is classified into three categories, one of which introduces the discussion concepts by providing background details illustrating their significance and analysing Marx's theory on the labour market and the role of females in the workplace. The second section includes justification and reasons for conducting the analysis. The following section contains an overview of the research structure.

1.2 Research Background

The historical oppression of pregnant women in the workplace derives from the conventional cultural belief that women's positions are solely that of a wife and mother (Mama, 2020). According to macro-historical models, industrialisation contributes to long-term rises in women's job rates, whether motivated by modernisation or Marxist approaches (Russell et al., 2017). In Marxist analysis, labour-power is characterised as the ability to work and the willingness to work; a living labourer standard is priced on the labour market and in return for a decent living wage (Heitlinger, 1979).

According to comparative studies, female involvement in the labour force is determined not only by economic growth but also by national labour market frameworks, educational systems, government policies, and family systems (Tilly and Scott, 1978; Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011). The transition in women's positions in relation to paid employment has been one of the most significant shifts in western societies over the last fifty years (Russellet et al.,

2017). In 1919, for the first time in its history, women's rights were recognised and adopted by the Maternity Protection Convention (1919) by the International Labour Organisation (The New York Times, 2019). The I.L.O. has endorsed additional two maternity protection Conventions in 1952 and 2000; since then, safe Maternity Leave, health care for mothers and new-borns has become the argument of contrasting researches (I.L.O., 2014). The role of social insurance is to protect individuals who are unable to consistently carry out activities rated to their work-life due to the random events defined in law (Pasternak-Malicka, 2021).

The remarkable value of a written constitution is that it imposes, in unchanging form, limits on legislative conduct, the degree of which is affected by a question of fact that is debatable and debated. Nevertheless, when a query that influences the extent of one of those limitations is uncertain and discussed, a common and long-held conviction concerning that fact is worth consideration (Muller, 2017).

The policies assist mothers who are tired or experiencing problems during childbirth regarding their vitality, resulting in an increased capacity to care for their children (Zagorskey, 2017).

The balance between career development and motherhood is not easy; lifestyle has a massive impact on women's decisions but, is there any perfect time for women to have a baby? As per fertility experts physiologically, the right age for a woman is in her twenties when her body is strong and healthy (Helena Tubridy, 2020); nonetheless, women in their twenties may not have concluded education, career, and personal development progression (Walsh, 2019). The trademark of career development depends on rapid changes throughout life, including individual variables and relationships (Martin, 2015).

Family-friendly initiatives, such as maternity leave, flexible work arrangements, and childcare benefits, can also play a role in the cross-country variability of motherhood impacts. They are typically aimed at promoting female labour supply and are inextricably linked to gender norms (OECD, 2001).

As per a Deloitte survey (2016) of over 1000 people in the United States, more than one-third of men believe that taking paternity leave would jeopardise their job, and more than half believe that their leave would be viewed as a lack of commitment (Deloitte, 2016).

Empirical and analytical researchers emphasise the negative socioeconomic consequences of maternity leave policy (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017). Equality would mitigate the adverse effects of raising a child on women's employment (Unece, 2019). Men could be less impacted by having a child if they base their expectations on women's observed inequality because the consequences would be more evenly balanced (Ni Aodha, 2016).

According to Ibec (2018), 57.8 percent of Irish women hold jobs at all levels, but women are still significantly underrepresented in top managerial positions.

1.3 Justification and Rationale for Research

Different opinions and approaches have been adopted regarding Maternity Leave over the years. This research aims to discover the unpublished stories based on real experiences; and how the Human Resource department interfaces by fostering cultures of trust, fairness, and inclusion to retain, engage and motivate employees (CIPD, 2021), the lifeblood of every organisation (Guinnigle et al., 2011).

It is unjust to ask women to put their careers on the line to care for a child by not holding the other parent to the same standard. Furthermore, men's involvement in parental leave can help to level the field when it comes to leaving discrimination (Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2016).

The leader's attitude from the different countries and industries could be disparate regarding the maternity leave as outlined below.

According to the C.E.O. of The Equality Authority, Renee Dempsey 'It is unethical to discriminate against the women at work whether they are pregnant or for a reason related to their pregnancy, such as childbirth or Maternity Leave. Amid this, pregnancy discrimination continues to be a significant impediment to women's full equality in the Irish labour market. As a result, it is crucial that women are made aware of their rights about pregnancy at work and are assisted in asserting those rights; employers must also consider and embrace their obligations in this regard' (Russell and Banks, 2011).

In 2009, Lord Alan Sugar, British business magnate, responded to the question of whether he would employ a pregnant woman by saying that he could not see why he would hire anyone on a full-time job knowing that person would be gone on maternity leave soon (Sparrow, 2009).

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Arden announced that the pregnancy will undoubtedly be scrutinised and will elicit a slew of stereotyped views about pregnant women losing concentration during pregnancy - 'pregnancy brain fog', irrational, etc. Indeed, women go out of their way to compensate for misconceptions and prove that they are competent; those

stereotypes are harmful and lead to workplace obstacles. Unfortunately, they are still alive after all these years (Garner, 2018).

Pregnancy may also herald the slow decline from leadership that many working mothers would face at some point in their career development. There are different cases where women are kept back from top assignments, do not receive deserving promotions or bonuses, or are relegated as soon as they return from ML (Tulshyan, 2016).

According to Slater and Gordon poll (2014), one-third of managers would instead hire a man in his twenties or thirties than women of the same age, and six out of ten mothers felt marginalised from the moment they announced pregnancy. Additionally, affirmed that 40% of the 500 managers polled are typically wary of recruiting women of childbearing age (Slater Gordon Lawyers, 2014).

Different opinions and experiences about the topic influenced the project to discover the hidden tolls of child-rearing and caregiving on career advancement and women's lived maternity leave experiences.

1.4 Structure of the Research Project

The term 'research design' refers to a rational strategy for moving from here to there' (Yin, 2009). The research design structure incorporated the research question features and the approaches required for completing the research.

The study includes the following chapters to help understand the effect of ML on women's career development.

Chapter one: Introduction

This chapter presents the research topic, historical background, challenges regarding the ML and justifications and rationale for the analysis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two will examine the up-to-date material pertaining to the area of study by analysing a synthesis of previous research. Will be comparing the ML policies in Ireland to other European countries in terms of Duration, allowances and benefits. How the H.R. department facilitates ML, flexible work arrangements, and family-friendly policies at the workplace.

Chapter Three: Research Question

This chapter states the research question, research aims and objectives and hypothesis,

Chapter four: Research Methodology

Chapter four summarises each research method linking to the research topic by describing how the problem was investigated and why particular methods and techniques were employed to attain the research objectives.

Chapter Five: Analysis and Findings

Will be synthesised data collected and relevant theories, and a summary of what was found in relation to the research question.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Implication

Chapter six will discuss a relationship between the collected data and the research objectives by considering the implications and future possibilities.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Recommendation

The last chapter will provide appropriate and insightful recommendations to the work undertaken by drawing the reader's attention to the salient points in a critical.

2.1 Introduction

Prior to delving into the experiences associated with the effects of ML in women's career development, it is necessary to conduct a review of the existing literature and scholarly information on the topic. This discourse will help the reader to gain a better understanding of the research subject. The primary goal of this literature review is to provide a summary of the literature on ML, Human resource role in implementing the ML policies, the impact and experiences faced by the female employees in Ireland.

2.2 Motherhood

The cultural practice of basing women's identities on their ability to nurture new-borns and children is known as motherhood (Parpart et al., 2000). In Europe, it only dates from the late eighteenth century as a set concept. The fallacy of combining motherhood, mothering, and Maternity is starkly demonstrated by the panorama of changing discourses and practices afforded by social history (Ross, 2018). Motherhood results from specific historical conditions, social processes, and meaning differing by culture, race, religion, and historical period. Regardless of these differences, in many countries, parenthood is an essential duty for women; according to Terry Arendell (2000), males may physically and mentally care for infants. Hence, the word 'mothering' is not limited to women's experiences (Arendell, 2000). It is crucial to recognise that the expectations and roles of modern motherhood are highly influenced by economic and political factors (Ross, 2018).

In the context of females, pregnancy alters their lives and reshapes their career growth, income development, and the community in which they function (Vondracek, Lerner and Schulenberg, 2019).

All developed countries and several developing countries have some kind of parental leave policy to improve women's labour outcomes, parent-child relations, and children's health and development (Blau and Khan, 2013). Nevertheless, almost all parental leave policies support mothers over fathers (OECD, 2019). Focusing parental leave policies solely on mothers has negative socioeconomic consequences for women, such as lower-income and increased domestic responsibilities, which can cancel out maternity leave benefits (Newman and Ryan, 2020). One of the negative consequences is equity; two parents have a child, but the mother bears the bulk of the responsibility for childcare. Uneven leave policies often produce an efficiency issue, as an adverse selection under symmetric knowledge results in inefficient negotiated leave contracts (Furbush, 2018). Maternity leave divides into two parts: pre and post break from the workplace (Aumayr-Pintar et al., 2015); many E.U. member states have changed their maternity leave policies in order to achieve the best practice and reduce the detrimental impacts on women's labour and career advancement (Loughlin, 2020).

2.3 Women in Workplace

Maternity leave policies significantly impact many labour markets results for women. They are expressly intended to minimise gender inequalities in different aspects of working life and mitigate the negative consequences of fertility decisions (Brugiavini, Pasini and Trevisan, 2013). Women's involvement in the paying labour market has increased significantly in Ireland and worldwide over the last few decades (Russell and Banks, 2011). A new E.U. work-life Balance Directive went into effect in August 2019 with the specific goals to

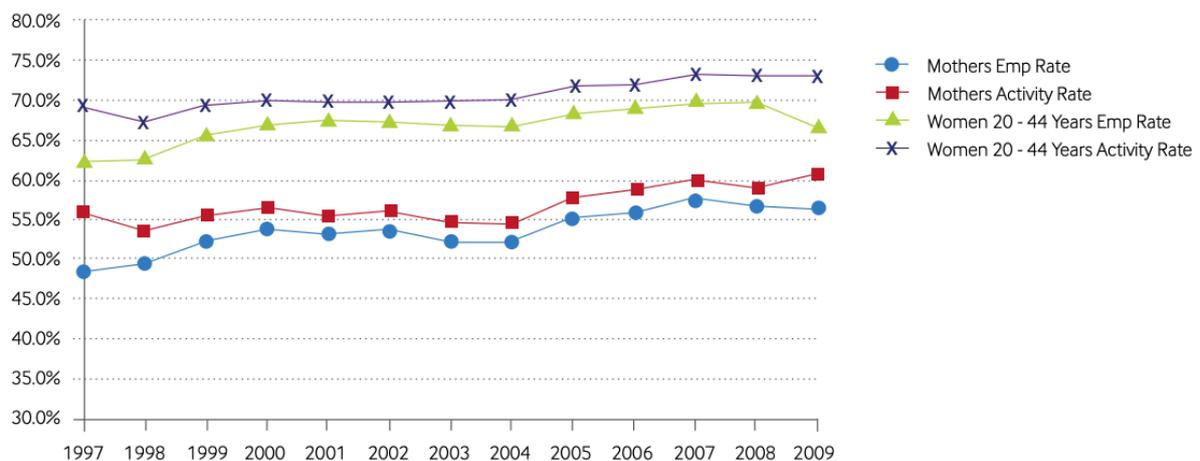
promote better work-life balance for parents and caregivers; to encourage more equitable sharing of parental leave between men and women; and the last to resolve women's lack of representation in the labour market (Newman and Ryan, 2020).

Irish history proudly depicts the constitutional shifts in women's role, as well as archival evidence of women's participation in the labour force (O'Sullivan, 2012). Evaluating the expansion of Irish women's labour force participation rate is limited due to controversial issues in historical data, but it is clear that participation has been steadily increasing since the 1970s, especially amongst married women (Fahey, 1990; Fahey et al., 2000).

The majority of mothers with small children and women of childbearing age are now working, and their care during and after pregnancy has grown in importance over time.

Three-quarters of all females of average childbearing age 20-44 are working, as are 60% of mothers with pre-school kids (Russell and Banks, 2011).

Figure 1 trends in occupations and activity rates among mothers with kids under the age of five and women aged 20 to 44 in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2010).



Women’s engagement in the workplace has increased dramatically during the previous two decades. Central Statistics Office confirmed that in 2001 54.6% of women aged 15-64 were in paid employment, which rose to 60.7% by 2007 (C.S.O., 2011). The Vital statistics 2020 published by the Central Statistics Office of Ireland demonstrated that the scenario had been thoroughly changed comparing to the past years in terms of the average age of mothers, age at Maternity, nationality of parents and occupation of mothers.

In quarter 3, 2020 were 5.9% fewer births than in the same period, 2019, and the average age of mothers increased from 0.1 years to 33.0 years.

Figure 2 illustrates the registered births, classified by mothers' nationality and the average age of mothers at Maternity in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2020).

Nationality of Mother	Total Births Number	Percentage	Average age of mother at Maternity
TOTAL	14,477	100	33
Ireland	11,135	76.9	33.3
United Kingdom	291	2	32.5
EU14 excl. Irl	314	2.2	34.6
EU15 to EU 27	1,361	9.4	31.7
Other	1,372	9.5	32.3

Employment that offers enough remunerations and health care is physically and interpersonally safe, allows for time and adequate relaxation, and has values that match one’s own family and society ideas characterised as decent work (Duffy et al., 2016).

Grounded in Psychology of Working Theory (P.W.T.) was created to study the work lives of people who are marginalised in some way; people of disadvantaged genders who are suffering economic hardships are more likely to have unfavourable physical and psychological health effects (England et al., 2020). Gender and socioeconomic status are commonly linked in the job (Acker, 2006). The intersections of gender and socioeconomic position has an

impact on career development outcomes (Heppner and O'Brien, 2006); furthermore, women are paid less than men for equivalent work and are less likely to get positions that pay them as much as males (International Labour Organization, 2018; O'Neill, 2019). According to research, women routinely report more career hurdles in the workplace than males in analogous situations (Luzzo and McWhirter, 2001). Furthermore, women are more likely to be assigned less demanding and challenging employment responsibilities (King et al., 2012). Compared to their male counterparts, women have less career mobility (De Pater et al., 2010) and are viewed as having fewer promotion prospects (Roth, Purvis and Bobko, 2012). According to studies, women face a glass ceiling as well as sticky floors when it comes to promotions and transitioning out of a low-status job (Pyle and Bond, 2002).

Women's representation on corporate boards varies widely worldwide (Adams and Kirchmeier 2015; Catalyst 2016, 2017; European Commission, 2013,2015). According to different authors, differences in Board Gender Diversity (B.G.D.) are influenced by the institutional environments (Devnew, 2018). Figure 3 shows the number of women on board in different countries from the highest to the lowest.

Country	ACR	%WD 2014	Q	Quota	Year	SO	LC	%Q	ED	NED
Norway	NOR	36.96	4	Hard quota	2003	Y	Y	40% 2006/08		
Kenya	KEN	26.63	3	Soft quota	2010	Y	N	33%		
Finland	FIN	26.61	3	Soft quota	2005	Y	N	40%	Y	Y
Sweden	SWE	25.30	1	Code	2004					
France	FRA	21.63	4	Hard quota	2011	Y	Y	40%	N	Y
New Zealand	NZL	17.11	3	Soft quota	2015	Y				
South Africa	ZAF	16.93	1	Code	2002					
Israel	ISR	16.90	3	Soft quota	2007	Y		50% 2010		
Italy	ITA	16.64	4	Hard quota	2011	Y	Y	33%	Y	Y
Denmark	DNK	16.24	2	Code/Target	2012	Y	Y		Y	Y
Nigeria	NGA	16.20	2	Code/Target	2011					
Belgium	BEL	15.36	4	Hard quota	2011	Y	Y	33%		
Netherlands	NLD	12.76	2	Code/Target	2011	Y	Y	30%	Y	Y
Poland	POL	11.91	1	Code	2015					
Spain	ESP	11.81	2	Code/Target	2007/15	Y	Y	40%/30%	N	Y
Colombia	COL	11.07	1	Code						
Malaysia	MYS	10.78	4	Hard quota	2004/11	Y	Y	30% 2016		
Ireland	IRK	10.08	1	Code	2013					
China	CHN	9.98	0							
Thailand	THA	9.95	0							
United Kingdom	GBR	9.88	2	Code/Target	2011			25% 2015		
Germany	DEU	9.82	4	Hard quota	2015	Y	Y	40% 2016	N	Y

2.4 Maternity Leave Policies vs Gender Norms as Potential Drivers of Cross-National Heterogeneity

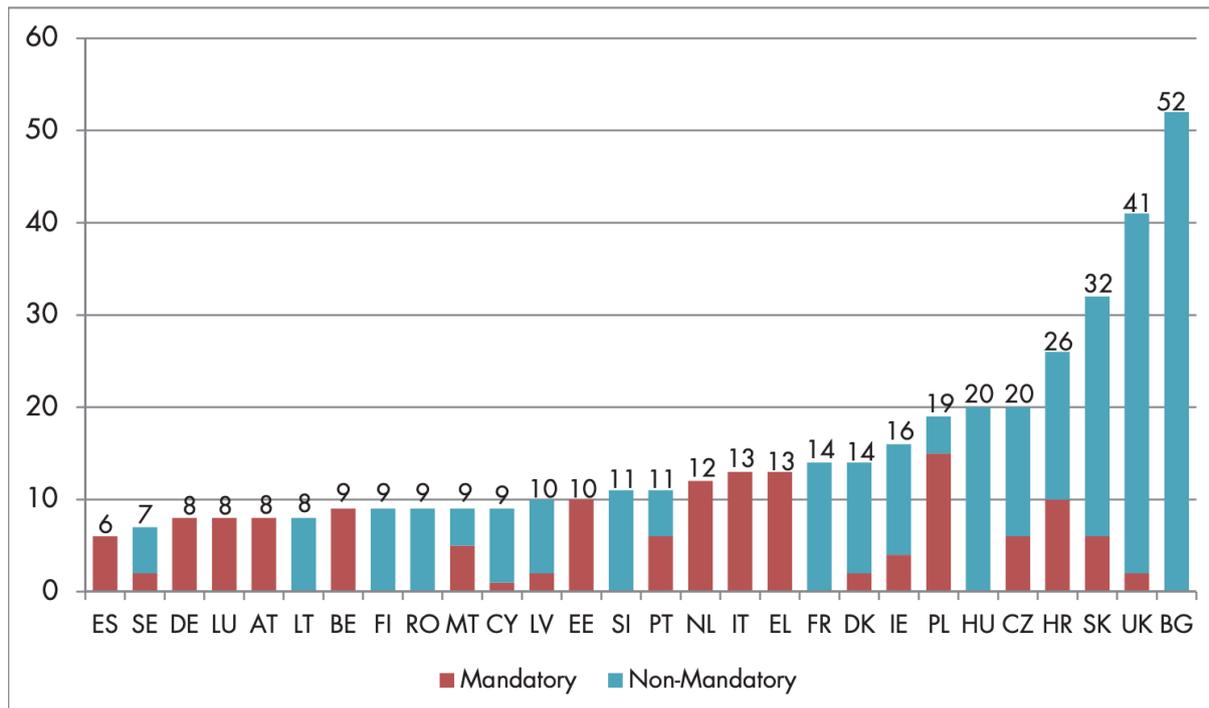
The aim of this section is to ascertain the impact of the Duration of ML on women's career development and evaluate the relationship between extended ML and women's economic activity. Analysing the literature on the topic leads to the conclusion that the theoretical study of women's labour-force participation is an exceedingly complicated process.

For more than two decades, the focus in most European countries employment policy and the labour market has been on the continuous development of women's vocational participation, which would also rely on the labour market conditions (Raisiena, Bagdonienb, and Bilan, 2014). Many E.U. countries have modified their maternity leave policies in recent years, based on study findings that extended durations of absence might negatively impact women's labour market engagement and career progression (Strang and Broeks, 2013). ML is regarded

as a health indicator, and an early return to work can be the cause of a variety of problems (Moss, 2015). According to the current Directive in the E.U., women have the right to a minimum of 14 weeks (3 months) of ML, of which at least two weeks are mandatory and can be allocated by a prospective mother before or after giving birth. The E.U. Maternity Leave Directive (92/85EEC) contains the key directives, serves as guidance and has been varied in various ways: length of leave (mandatory or voluntary), degree of compensations, the organisations in charge of delivering it, and the amount of flexibility allowed in the mode of intake. Citizens information (2021) in Ireland confirms 26 weeks of paid leave with the option of an additional 16 weeks of unpaid leave. Future mothers should endure a minimum of two weeks and a maximum of 16 weeks before giving birth.

The period of paid leave has a considerable impact on incomes; shorter leaves had no effect on women's revenues, while longer leaves resulted in 2-3% declines in women's wage inequality. These results support the hypothesis that women who take the long period of ML can develop their position at home and make up ground to their male counterparts outside the house. They indicate that unequal leave mandates have unforeseen downward trend effects on female labour outcomes (Furbush, 2018). The graph below depicts the number of post-natal maternity leave weeks in 28 European countries, highlighting the difference in leave duration, obligatory, non-obligatory, and a mixture of the two: (European Parliament, 2014).

Figure 4 Post-Natal Maternity Leave in Europe



Examination of each European country individually has demonstrated that motherhood reduces the likelihood of working in all of them, but the results vary greatly. Ireland appears to have the most significant motherhood influence; other western European countries Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Austria, followed (Berniell et al., 2020).

Several scientific studies have investigated the decline in women’s economic activity following the extension of maternity leave. According to research conducted in European countries, excessive childcare leave has a detrimental impact on women’s economic activity as well as their likelihood of returning to work (Rhum, 1998; Thevenon and Solaz, 2013). It is hard to predict the ideal period of maternity leave that will have the most significant positive effect on women’s jobs. ML is increasingly being extended in most countries in accordance with E.U. policies. The key reason for developing the Duration of paid leave to care for a child is to fulfil family responsibilities and make returning to work after childbirth easier. Duration of ML can be evaluated in terms of both the positive effects like improving

childcare and its negative implications on women's labour-force participation and employers' reluctance to hire them.

2.5 Maternity Leave Benefits

According to Walker, pregnancy entails a range of costs, and it is unfair to compel women to bear these costs solely. The point is based on the widely held belief that parents should share the financial burden of raising their children. Although the financial burden of child-rearing starts at conception, parental financial support should also commence at that time (Walker, 2009). Women workers, ethnic backgrounds, migrant workers are disproportionately represented in the workplace (Groucher et al., 2013).

Maternity rights aim is to ensure the welfare of mothers and their children, including ML during childbirth; health care at the workplace for pregnant and breastfeeding females; financial and healthcare coverage; employment protection and non-discrimination; support after the return to work (I.L.O., 2011). Furthermore, the language used to describe workplace practices has been heavily criticised due to a variety of implicit and deceptive assumptions. Such policies are gender-neutral and flexible working is explicitly enforced to meet the needs of employees (Lewis et al., 2007). The effectiveness of national and workplace policies to promote women's equal opportunities and treatment in labour markets and gender equality at work is contingent on adequate and affordable maternity protection and family-friendly facilities and work assignments (Cruz,2012).

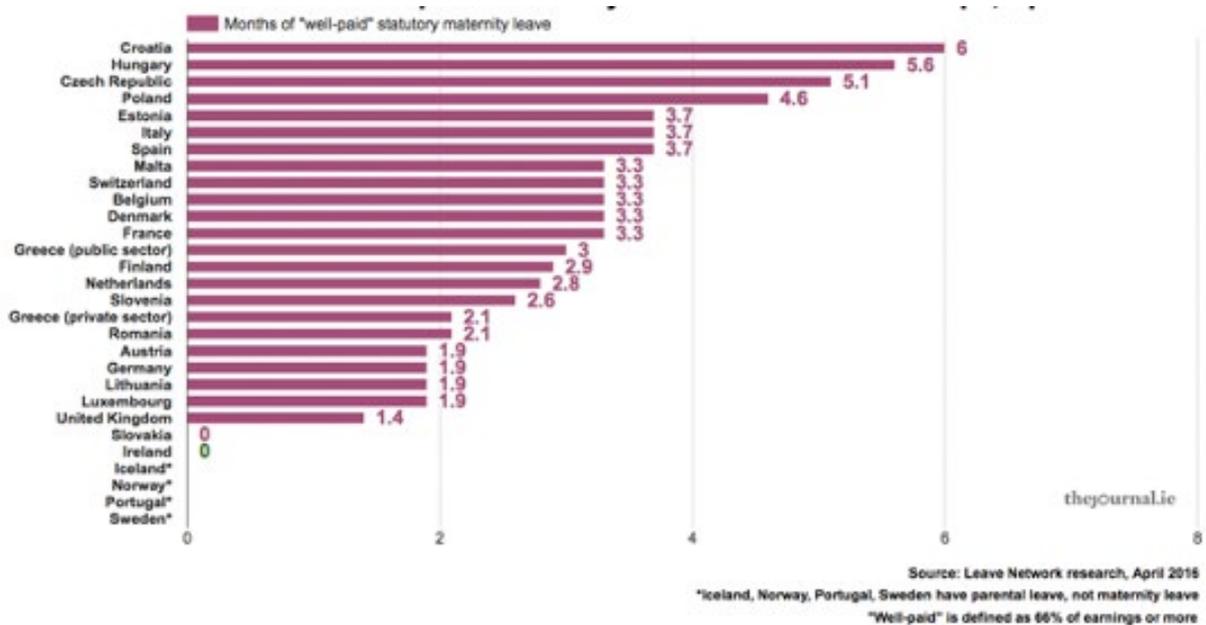
Enabling paid maternity leave for female employees is often a top priority for politicians and workers in many countries (Donovan, 2018). Compensation is an essential aspect of ML, which may be fixed for the leave duration or may change during this period. Working mothers in Ireland are entitled to ML starting in 2014 if they have made at least 39 weeks of

social security payments since the beginning of their employment (European Commission, 2014).

In Ireland, the compensation is established by the individual employment contract. The employee may obtain the entire payment from the employer, or women may be eligible to maternity companion weekly rate 2021 of euro 245 (Citizens Information, 2021).

When it comes to the legal minimum wage, Ireland and Slovakia place near the bottom of the European league, Irish females are not legally allowed to any ‘well-paid’ ML, 66 percent of usual earnings or more, according to the leave Network (MacGuill, 2017).

Figure 5 Duration of well-paid maternity leave in Ireland and Europe, April 2016 (Koslowski, 2016).



According to an IBEC survey conducted in 2018 demonstrated that for ML, 60 percent of participant businesses pay over and above social welfare benefits to workers, with 82

percentage of these companies paying for the entire 26 weeks leave. Their decision is mainly based on company size, industry, region, and turnover (Ibec, 2018). Maternity Leave should be planned for as part of the usual organisational planning and budgeting phase. The goal is to ensure that adequate arrangements are made to minimise the effect on the bottom line if a team member goes on ML. When preparation is ignored, the result is a reactive rather than proactive response (Ibec, 2018).

In some instances, there seems to be a lot of ML in the household. Shared ML and benefits Bill 2018 is about getting a say, having flexibility for both parents and equality. The bill considers possible options for the family needs. For example, if the mother makes more money than the husband, it might be more beneficial for the family's needs to allow her to return to work. The bill does not aim to deprive new mothers of their rights; instead, it aims to restore women's freedom of choice (House of the Oireachtas, 2018).

2.6 Childcare Costs in Ireland

According to Infant Cohort of the Growing Up in Ireland study shows that non-parental childcare was provided to 38.6% of new-borns, with 12.4% being cared for by grandparents, 15.7% by other home-based carers and 10.5% at childcare canters such as crèches (McNally, Share and Murray, 2014). The government continues to prioritise childcare services, as seen by the launch of the Free Pre-School Year program in 2010. Ireland's National Children's Strategy acknowledges the need for combinations of official and informal assistance for children's well-being; policymakers pay little attention to the supply of grandparent childcare (Government of Ireland, 2000). Such care is a vital part of intergeneration connections and reciprocity, and it helps keep social and economic life going (Lynch and Lyons, 2008).

According to the European Commission study, Ireland has one of the youngest populations of children under the age of five in Europe. Still, it is also one of the most expensive countries in terms of childcare (Lynne, 2019). Thus according to recent numbers issued by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, parents in sections of Dublin pay up to 70% more for childcare than those in rural areas (Department of Children and Youth, 2020). Recent media reports on no-compliance with standards in nurseries crèches have prompted calls for a tightening of the present inspections process, as well as a much closer look at how childcare is run on a day-to-day basis (Murphy, 2015).

The childcare Pre-School Regulations in 2006 of Síolta and 2009 Aistear defined health and safety requirements, the national quality structure for early childhood education for children aged birth to six; however, both have been implemented slowly (NCCA, 2009). Such programs indicate a paradigm change in Irish public policy, emphasising the vital role of early childhood care and education in accomplishing lifelong learning (NESF, 2005). Even if with the availability of the ECCE program in early life, pathways into no-parental care are racially differentiated from infancy through middle childhood; while many middle-income families with several kids find it challenging to find affordable day-care, it is a substantial obstacle to employment for low-income and single-parent families (Byrne and O'Toole, 2015).

According to research by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, an Irish double-income couple with two children may spend up to 45 percent of their net income on childcare, which looked at 32 industrialised nations (OECD, 2004). Full-time day-care expenditures typically vary from euro 730 to 1,100 per month, with two-child households spending an average of euro 16,500 per year (Indecon, 2013).

The research showed that the unreasonably high cost of childcare was a barrier to employment, with 26% of parents stating that childcare arrangements prohibited them from returning to work or training (Donegal Country Childcare Committee, 2013).

There is a growing awareness that a lack of cheap childcare has far-reaching societal repercussions, particularly in terms of preventing childcare and their families from falling into poverty and promoting gender equality (National Women's Council, 2005; O'Toole, 2013). Despite the high expense, the quality of the services is frequently below acceptable minimal requirements; in 2008, UNICEF analysed the quality of early childhood services across 25 OECD countries, Ireland barely met one of the ten standards set and finished in joint last position in the league standings (UNICEF, 2008). Dublin has the highest daycare prices in Ireland (Horgan-Jones, 2019). It appears that parents are just working to pay for day-care; the high expense of children may deter parents from returning to work after having children. The adoption of the EU Directive on Work-life Balance will assist employees and families in obtaining flexible working arrangements. Childcare costs and services in Ireland will be discussed during the interviews with the participants based on their experiences and coherence with career development.

2.7 Flexible Working Arrangements and Family-Friendly Policies

2.7.1 FWAs

According to the Children and Families Act 2014, 'Flexible working' refers to any sort of working arrangement that differs from the typical Monday-Friday, nine-to-five paradigm and allows workers to work for more extended periods of time other locations and at different times. In April 2003, parents of young and disabled children in the United Kingdom were

given the opportunity to seek flexible working hours for the first time (De Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). Governments all around the globe have implemented rules to assist employees in balancing their personal and professional lives (Radcliffe and Cassell, 2014).

Kumar and Chakraborty (2013) propose creches, flexible work schedules, part-time work, and phased maternity return as strategical approaches that an organisation may give its employees work-life balance. McCarthy et al. (2013) noted the importance of the variety of job sharing, flexibility with work hours, and on-site child care as introductory offers to reduce the stress associated with multi-tasking (Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Newman and Mathews, 1995). Many organisations focus on flexible working arrangements (FWAs), such as flexitime, job sharing, and work-from-home options (Kelly and Moen, 2007; Kossek and Lautsch, 2018). FWAs are work practices that provide greater control over where, when, and how to work is done (Chung and van der Horst, 2018), and it is associated with employees work effort (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). Different but overlapping reasons for the relationship between FWAs and labour effort are discussed in various literature; the most common explanations are based on social exchange ideas such as gift exchange and psychological contract theories (Kossek and Lautsch, 2018). Employee-organisation exchanges are common; they are usually not negotiated but are instead implicit (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

Compared to employees with fixed hours, employees who feel more freedom to establish their hours tend to intensify their labour and /or work longer durations. The mechanism underlying this is frequently reciprocal behaviour (Beckmann et al., 2017).

According to Golden (2009), married employees and employees with small children are more likely to utilise FWAs, particularly for children reasons, since women often handle the

majority of family and care responsibilities (Konrad and Mangel, 2000). Bloom et al. (2011) state that women with family obligations take greater leaves of absence and, while back at work, seek out flexible practices to adapt to family demands. Employees well-being is linked to work effort (Avgoustaki & Frankort, 2018; Sánchez, 2017); therefore, such measures will benefit employees. Employers will benefit indirectly as well because happier employees are more productive and more minor inclined to quit their positions (Anderson et al., 2002). Identifying and encouraging strategies that promote work-life balance and well-being in general and company productivity and financial success are challenges for both managers and policymakers (Avgoustaki and Bessa, 2019).

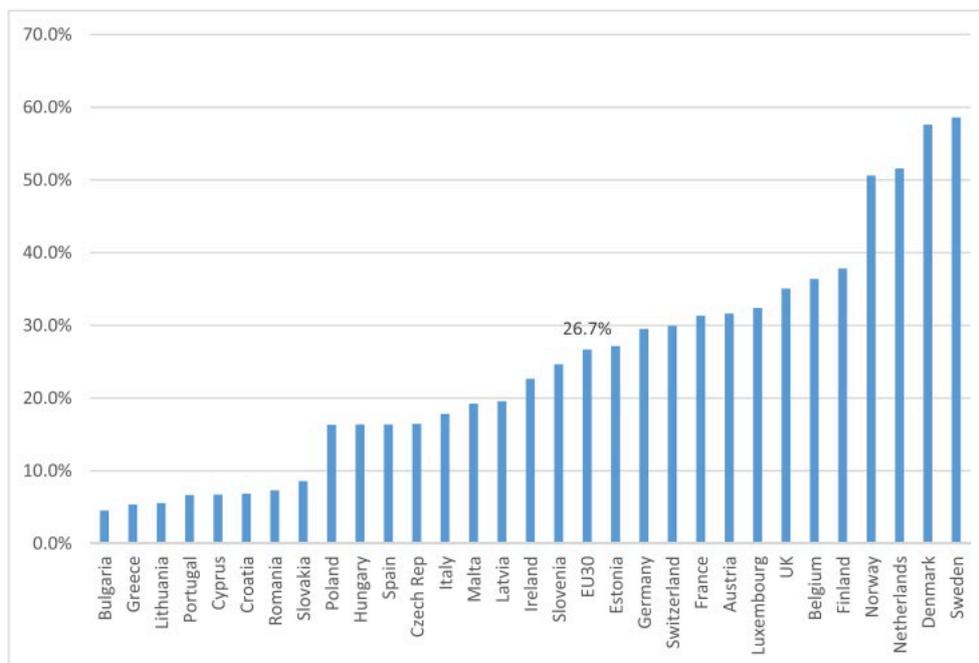
2.7.2 Family-friendly Policies

A considerable number of employees across Europe are struggling to manage work and family life as women's labour market participation rises and dual-earner families become more common (Chung, 2017). A dedicated and sustainable workforce is critical to an organisation's long-term sustainability. Healthy and committed personnel are essential for maintaining a competitive edge and sustainability (Afonja, 2019).

Family-friendly policies are intended to assist employees in managing their family obligations, creating flexible work environments, and enabling them to perform better at home and work. Family-Friendly policies (FFPs) look after the whole work environment to ensure that workers' demands for work-life balance are satisfied (Afonja, 2019). A sustainable and committed workforce, according to Kosseck et al. (2014), is one in which the work environment is caring and supportive of employees' well-being. Employees are not viewed as a crucial resource that may be deployed and drained to meet the financial goals of

their employers. Employees with good personal life bring talents and positive vibes from home to work (Ruderman et al., 2002). These family-friendly policies are utilized for performance enhancement and work-family integration goals (Goodstein, 1994). They are critical for women to maintain their market position after having a child (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018).

As per the research conducted by Chung in 2018, Figure 6 demonstrated the percentage of working mothers with access to FFP's in European counties; Latvia, Bulgaria, Ireland, and the United Kingdom are among the nations where female carers believe it is pretty simple to take a couple of hours off work to deal with personal matters (Chung, 2018).



FFPs can decrease parenting stress and enhance parental wellness, resulting in better, happier families and healthier children (UNICEF, 2019). UNICEF's statement emphasizes the essential responsibilities that governments, employers, and civil society can play in pushing for and implementing FFPs to reap the benefits of these investments in human and economic development. The main sets of policies include:

- In both the official and informal sectors, sufficiently paid leave for all parents and guardians to fulfil the requirements of their young children. Paid maternity, paternity, and parental leave and leave to take care of sick young children.
- Supporting working mothers' capacity to breastfeed exclusively for six months, as suggested by international guidelines and to continue nursing for as long as they choose.
- Providing all children with affordable, high-quality childcare and early education.
- Providing fair wages and child benefits to assist families in providing for their young children (UNICEF, 2019).

2.8 Quality Life and Gender

This paper looks into the quality of life of employed mothers; the well-being of employees in a company is referred to as quality of life (Andrews and McKennell 1980).

The following factors at work may have an impact on one's well-being or quality of life (Sojka, 2014).

2.8.1 Work-life Balance

While defining the idea of work-life balance, it is critical to recognise that this concept may be regarded as a social construct, an object that both symbolise the presence of reality and also reveal the object (Lewis and Beauregard, 2018); as a result, work-life balance may be defined from an individual's perspective, with a concentration on the specific knowledge-

intensive white-collar job (Campbell, 2000; Greenhouse and Powell, 2006). It may also describe the best practices for achieving work-life balance in the workplace, such as work-hour flexibility or parental leave and perks (Beauregard and Henry, 2009).

One of the elements that influence employee work stress is the workload. The frequency of work is referred to as a workload (Shah et al., 2011).

According to Wayne et al. (2017), the term 'balancing' in 'work-life balance' refers to an individual's endeavour to maintain a low level of conflict between personal and professional responsibilities. As a result, it should not be viewed in isolation and must be balanced alongside life (Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport, 2006). Their quality of life fuels every working adults desire to balance job and family. The way a person evaluates improvement in many aspects of their life is referred to as quality of life (Theofilou, 2013)

Work-family conflict directly impacts one's quality of life (Koh et al., 2016).

Work-life balance refers to the level of happiness that a person can achieve after spending long hours in an office (Pasamar and Pasamar, 2015). Work-life balance may be described as the amount of time spent concentrating on one's career versus time spent with family and doing activities that one enjoys (Evertsson, 2013).

Based on the discussion thus far, it can be determined that the phrase 'work-life balance' does not have a single complete meaning; the writer follows the practice where the work-life balance impacts organisational performance.

2.8.2 Family and work responsibilities

Because women's dedication to their families is natural, work become a secondary priority, and women's career may suffer as a result (Ely and Padavic, 2020).

Women are more likely to be in charge of unpaid labour such as childcare and household chores (Haider and Azmi, 2019).

During the 'Celtic Tiger' period (1995-2007), however, the employment rate of women in Ireland rose (Drew and Humbert, 2012). According to a recent survey in 2020, 61 percentage of women with children under the age of 18 would prefer to work part-time than 29 percentage of men with children of the same age (Steen, 2020). To meet maternal and career duties and requirements, work and family responsibilities are necessary. Food, housing, money, educations, transportation, and other life-essential resources are provided through work and family duties (Peterson and Green, 2009). Working parents who cannot combine their job and family responsibilities may experience work-family conflict, jeopardising their quality of life. Every working adult has a specific function to play in their workplace, family or whatever position they hold. Working mothers have a hard time balancing work and family responsibilities, resulting in work-family conflict. Work-family conflict arises when work and family obligations collide simultaneously; home care responsibilities occur while the staff focus on office chores (Gombak and Lumpur, 2004).

2.9 H.R. Role in Maternity Leave

Human Resource (HR) has evolved into a high-quality service provider that serves as a trusted advisor, business partner, and consultant in strategic decision-making since the 1990s

(Jamieson and Vogelsang, 2013). One of the factors for a company's success, according to Wright (2006), is the level of work satisfaction among its employees.

By improving HR practices and maximising human potential, the partners share a goal of creating a world of work that works for everyone advocating better work and working lives and empowering people and workplaces (CIPD, 2020). The HRM functions involvement in shaping culture is significant, according to the literature on strategic HRM, and this has consequences for the HRM functions on organisational change (Ulrich 1997; Yeung, Brockbank and Ulrich 1991). HRM is a comprehensive and consistent strategy for hiring and developing employees. HRM can be seen as a philosophy about how people should be managed, based on a variety of beliefs about human and organisational behaviour (Armstrong, 2014). HRM brings together and connects all activities related to the organisation's working environment and personnel (Boxall and Purcell, 2011).

The environment encompasses everything outside of an organisation that may have an impact on its current or future activities, and it is divided into external and internal variables (Kew and Stredwick, 2010). External factors such as legal factors are regulated by laws in the market. Organisations and HR professionals have to guarantee the alignment between the Irish law regarding the ML and the company's internal policies. According to Hall, 2005 phrase 'people are organisations greatest assets' became a pearl of wisdom. HR as an employee advocate maximises workers commitment and contribution (Caldwell, 2003) by being a voice for employees and representing their concerns to senior managers to improve internal policies for higher motivation and engagement, which turned into low turnover, increased productivity and efficient work (Ekuma, 2015).

According to specific empirical surveys, HR specialists are still primarily concerned with the more traditional administrative functions (Boxall and Purcell, 2008; Caldwell, 2003; Truss et

al., 2002, other research suggests that strategic HR positions can be performed concurrently with the operational HR role (Lemmergaard, 2009; Truss, 2008).

Parallel to the HR role debates, the broader strategic HRM literature indicates that HR may be a source of competitive advantage, particularly when corporate strategy and HRM practices are matched (Beer et al., 1984; Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Guest, 1987; Jackson & Schuler, 1995; Michie & Sheehan, 2005; Porter, 1985; Truss & Gratton, 1994). Organisations that attempt to compete by adopting a cost-based strategy, on the other hand, take a very different approach to human capital development and management. The primary focus here is on lowering costs wherever feasible, and as a result, businesses employing this strategy want to improve staff efficiently throughout HRM (Acar & Zehir, 2010; Yamin et al., 1999).

Employers should have a robust framework and policies to address any possible harassment or discrimination against women, including unconscious bias, and their rules should encompass all aspects of employment, including recruiting, training, and promotion (Suff, 2016).

The CIPD polled over 1,000 HR professionals to help parents and caregivers at work and found that most companies lack a consistent approach. A third of businesses (33%) stated they do not provide any of the ten forms of assistance outlines to support working parents (CIPD, 2017). Maternity protection is a vital component of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda 4 and an essential for the interdependence of social reproduction and economic output.

More mothers with small children have returned to work recently (Early Childhood Ireland, 2019). Due to the economy's fast expansion, the number of households with both parents working has increased (Russell, O'Connell and CGinnity, 2009). Here comes the importance of parental leave policies to retain the employees.

2.10 Conclusion

Work-life balance and FF policies should be mentioned as strategic objectives for HR professionals. All organisations should strive for a solid balance between work and family responsibilities. This will help them attract talented individuals and retains existing skilled personnel to maintain a productive workforce. Companies in Ireland need to provide flexibility in working hours that address the needs of male and female employees. Reviewing prior research on the subject, it is clear that work-life balance and FWA are fundamental for working mothers. The aim of this paper is to examine the correlation between career development and ML policy exitance in the workplace and how HR professionals can implement better experiences.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH QUESTION

3.1 Research question

Does taking Maternity Leave impact women's career development, and what are the challenges if there are any women experience in Ireland?

3.2 Research Aim and Objectives

This research will investigate and address the effect of maternity leave on women's career advancement and how the H.R. department in organisations implement ML policies in Ireland. This review explores the synthesis of a wide range of literature on women's

experiences during pregnancy or subsequent return to work. Will evaluate opportunities in the workplace before, during, and after maternity leave in Ireland, authentic perspectives of working mothers will be extended to various publications and studies to uncover the untold stories of maternity leave and career advancement

The primary goal of this research is to examine the challenges and effects of ML on women's career growth in Ireland. The study goals used to achieve this aim are as follows:

- ML and career development are complex fields of H.R.M. that have an impact on organisations. The aim is to look at women who decided to have children and whether this positively or negatively affects their career growth.
- The second objective will be to see if there is a connection between ML and career development, emphasising women between the ages of 30 and 45 who will be interviewed from various industries in Ireland.
- Determining the policies that support the improvements that H.R.M. would implement in order to improve the ML policies.

3.3 The research hypothesis

The term hypothesis refers to an assertion that can be checked to determine the correlation or relationship between two variables, or it relates to a proposition that can be validated to determine the relationship between events or concepts (Sounders et al., 2016).

Furthermore, it is a method of predicting any outcome based on current information.

The following hypothesis are being considered for this study:

Hypothesis 1:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): Taking ML affects women's career development to a greater extent.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): Taking a ML does not affect women's career development to a greater extent.

Hypothesis 2:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): ML benefits and allowances offered are sufficient for work-life balance in Ireland.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): ML benefits and allowances offered are not sufficient for work-life balance in Ireland.

The research hypothesis is whether ML influences or has a significant impact on women's career development, the glass ceiling concept as a barrier to career success.

Other concerns include gender pay, childcare costs in Ireland, organisational flexibility, including working hours and remote access before and after ML in Ireland.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR – METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Oxford Dictionary (2010) defines research as the ‘*Systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish fact and reach new conclusions*’ (Ragab, 2017).

All forms of study are predicated on some underlying assumptions regarding what constitutes legitimate research. Therefore, using suitable methods to achieve research goals is critical to ensure the integrity of the results (Myers and Avison, 1997). Thereby, while preparing the research, the author should be mindful of the advantages and disadvantages of various methodologies in order to make effective choices on the selection of study methods, determine the suitability of all such techniques, being conscious of their drawbacks, and validate their decisions based on the particular nature of the research endeavour (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

This chapter addresses the methods used in this study as well as the reasons why specific approaches were adopted. The methodology chapter provides the start with a comprehensive understanding of how and why the research is conducted and achieved and how the data was analysed to assess the results in the following sections.

4.2 Research Philosophy

Epistemology is the study of the origin of information and how it is obtained, which poses a similar two-fold controversy between positivism and interpretivism, which is known as phenomenology. Positivism approaches science from the theoretical perspective to develop generalised conclusions from experiments and systematic observations of fact (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). As applied to social science, the positivist model suggests that the researcher obtains data objectively, remaining independent of the research subject and external to the

research process (Remenyi et al., 1998). The finding of positivist studies is factual generalisations about social phenomena that can be replicated.

According to interpretivism, unlike natural phenomena, social phenomena are distinct since they are formed by individuals in specific situations and are too nuanced to be generalised rules and theorems (Crotty, 1998; Rowlands, 2005).

In contrast to positivism, the phenomenological approach investigates sociological trends inside their framework and believes in an intimate interaction between the researcher and the percipients. By constructing hypotheses on the basis of theories, this study has adopted positivism as its research philosophy.

4.3 The Research Approach

Deductive and inductive research methods may be used to explore the emergence of a modern theory. The first technique, known as the ‘top-down approach’, starts by proposing a hypothesis and then designs a research procedure to validate the idea (Trochim and Donnelly, 2008). Deductive reasoning explores scientific concepts, after which the author employs theory to generate results. This is known as the universal law principle (Adams, 2007). It necessitates a massive sample, which the use of quantitative methods can obtain. Its methodology can be highly organised, and the researcher should remain independent of the details.

Inductive research looks at the interpretation of concepts within a human context that could be attached to specific circumstances. Observations in particular situations form broad conclusions regarding a phenomenon and in a more in-depth analysis. Inductive reasoning operates in the opposite direction, progressing from the essential findings to more significant generalisations and hypotheses. This research was adopted the inductive approach of

interviewing the participants to gather information related to the ML and women's career development in Ireland. Induction is less concerned with generalisation and more concerned with having an intimate understanding of the research phenomenon within its contexts and therefore employs a more versatile investigation framework (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Douglas, 2003).

4.4 Research Methodology and Design

The aim of the research design is to examine the preparable context for a report. The choice to be taken about the research method is a vital decision creating the research since it defines how objectives of the study can be acquired; furthermore, the research design process includes several interrelated decisions (Aaker, 2000).

The first stage of the research involved a collection of semi-structured interviews. Hence, this study exploits a descriptive research design to determine the ML effect on women's career development in Ireland. The research mythologies must be consistent with the research paper's fundamental philosophies, which is among the most crucial decisions in any research. Quantitative methods explore phenomena by collecting quantifiable numerical data and analysing data using mathematical models and computational techniques (Creswell, 2002). Qualitative analysis is frequently used in social science to investigate associations between factors, generating predictive, casual, or confirmatory findings (Williams, 2011).

Experimentation, surveys, systematic analyses, and structured interviews are examples of quantitative analysis techniques (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

In comparison, qualitative research relies on words rather than numbers and can be broadly described as research whose results are not derived by quantification (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). It takes a systematic approach that seeks experimentation through participation in real

encounters and strives to provide an in-depth understanding of phenomena through data exploration and interpretation (Williams, 2011). Since this type of study is less formal and focuses on the meaning of formation, it often uses interpretivist and inductive analysis (Guest et al., 2012).

Thus, according to Bryman and Bell (2011), the processing of primary data analysis may be performed using either a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed process. Quantitative studies are conducted using a questionnaire or a sample to generate unmetrical data in a statistical way.

4.5 Rationale to use a Qualitative Method

The objective of this research is to analyse the ML impact on women's career development in Ireland. The researcher has adopted the qualitative research method to discover individuals' beliefs, behaviours, ideas, emotions, and authentic experiences based on real stories (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Rather than a structured interview procedure, qualitative analysts' base interviews on the more day-to-day conversation to discover unpublished stories regarding the topic. To understand the phenomena being investigated, qualitative analysis asks questions such as 'what is,' 'how,' or 'why.'

4.6 Research Instrument

A Research Instrument is a method for collecting, measuring, and analysing data relevant to the chosen topic. Interview, assessments, surveys, and checklists are examples of research instruments (Columbia University). The research instrument should be able to help address the research goals, priorities, and research questions, along with substantiating the study's

hypothesis (Discoverphds, 2020). The observation, survey, and interviews are three of the most commonly used research instruments. Semi-structured interviews were used to conduct this paper; a versatile subject guide offers a loose framework of open-ended questions to discuss perspectives and behaviours in such an interview. Semi-structured interviews elicit people's attitudes and descriptions, which had the advantage of revealing problems or concerns that the interviews had not expected (Trigueros and Hidalgo Sandoval, 2017). The survey differs from the semi-structured interview in that the latter retains many of the features of a focused interview.

4.7 Sample and Sampling

The analysis of a select number of 'events that constitute the wider population is called sampling (Henry, 1990). Sampling is a practical and reliable solution that enables research experiments to be completed under time and budget constraints. It can also produce more accurate findings than a survey because the small number of instances within the study provides more time to be devoted to tasks such as collection instrument design and processing, collection of valuable data, and comprehensive analysis of collected data (Henry, 1990). Sampling is an effective and accurate legitimate way of collecting data (Morse and Niehaus, 2009). The criterion for inclusion in the research lies in the participant's capacity to inform the research (Quinlan et al., 2018).

This research aims to achieve a sample size of 10-15 participants employed during their maternity period in Ireland.

4.8 Time Horizon

The longitudinal method was not suitable for use due to the scope of the study being gathered in a short period. A cross-sectional time horizon was used instead. The interviews were conducted over two weeks. In the first week, open-ended questions were checked in a pilot sample. Within the second week, any modifications to the questions were discussed in order to enhance the interviews.

4.9 Data Collection

The qualitative method was adopted for primary data collection to understand better the participant's interactions of examining the impact of ML in career development and the barriers if there are any women experience during and after ML in Ireland.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to perform the study. Since it is the most direct method of collecting accurate data based on real experiences. The researcher asked ten open and close-ended questions to the participants, who were requested to comment on their responses. It permitted the interviewer to delve further into the answer.

Due to the current pandemic scenario, to ensure the safety of the interviewer and the participants, the interviews were conducted using a video contact software, and correspondence was conducted by email.

The interviews were filmed using a video communication software developed, and to ensure that data are collected, the interviews were transcribed after they were completed.

Semi-structured interviews can be expressed in various settings, including face-to-face, phone, email, record, employees, and group interviews. Individual, face-to-face, and in-depth interviews are the most popular types of semi-structured interviews (Dejonckheere and Vaughn, 2019).

The interviews were planned and arranged ahead of time, and they have a versatile and adaptable format. Semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to probe answers rather than being restricted to a fixed list of questions. The interview has the opportunity to delve into data that is either nuanced or open-ended.

4.10 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data collection from library tools and various articles on ML, career developments, such as journals, newsletters, and other published documents, are also part of this work (Callahan, 2017).

Secondary data is used helpful in this analysis, but it is challenging to include secondary data to fit with the intent of this study and the research issue. A large amount of data is freely accessible for the researcher to use. This research, along with an analysis of the literature, analyses recent findings and provides validation.

4.11 Ethical Consideration quotes GDPR and women liked

Ethics are generally described as the collection of written and unwritten rules that regulate our standards of our own or others' conduct. The collection of ethics that governs how scientific and other research is conducted at research institutions such as universities and how it is disseminated is known as research ethics (Skillsyouneed, 2021).

The National College of Ireland has clear ethical standards that were followed during the research project. All personal information was preserved private and safe. When the researcher began the coding process, their data was de-identified. Ever since they proceeded, participants were sent both a consent form and an information form that provided them with all of the specifics of the study. They instructed them that they could avoid questions they wished not to answer and withdraw out of the process if they did not feel conformable.

This study was conducted in an ethical manner, which included representing and protecting participants privacy. The primary concern for this study is protecting the confidentiality of the respondents, so the researcher paid great attention to this regard.

Before the interview, all participants were asked for their permission. Their names and business will be kept private. Interviewees had the option to withdraw from the meeting at any time, as stated in the consent letter in Appendix. A brief introduction was given to the participant regarding the topic. They may also avoid answering any question without fear or consequences. The responses report was stored in a password-safe folder to ensure data privacy and confidentiality. When conducting research, “participants participating in the study must be given a direct affirmative act of processing their personal data, either through a written statement, or a confirmation by electronic or oral form” (GDPR.eu, 2020).

Semi-structured interviews will be used in a qualitative analysis approach to capture in-depth personal data. The sample was chosen using the accidental sampling process. A theoretical thematic approach will be used to analyse the results. This will be covered more in the methodology section.

4.12 Conclusion

Any research endeavour needs a strong backbone, where research methodology is essential. It describes the theoretical frameworks and research methodologies utilised (Saunders et al., 2009).

This chapter discusses the study methodology and the extensiveness of the analysis and data collection processes. An extensive effort was taken to ensure that obtained data were accurate. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the research issue, leading to discussion and conclusion topics in the report's final section.

CHAPTER FIVE – DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter addresses interview analysis in order to extract information from the collected data. The data collection and processing were done in accordance with the research objectives. The main objective of the research is to analyse the ML effect on career development in Ireland and HR role in order to improve the ML policies.

This chapter outlines the theme analysis and conclusions of the empirical data obtained during the semi-structured interviews with the eight participants.

The emerging themes appeared to be equally essential in the participants' growth to various degrees. The themes are given through quotes from participants as they recount their journey,

which serves as a narrative account and helps in the depiction of the different themes discovered.

5.2 Participants' Characteristics and Age

Characteristics of eight women participants employed in Ireland during and after their maternity leave. The age range is between 30 to below 45 years. The participants were guaranteed anonymity; therefore, their names have been changed.

5.3 Coding

The grounded theory, created by Corbin and Strauss (1990), is a coding method used by the researchers to analyse the obtained data from wight participants. Saldaa's (2009) coding handbook was utilised for open, axial, and selective coding.

5.3.1 Pre-Coding Stage (Familiarisation)

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the initial steps of the thematic analysis were to transcribe the interviews and analyse and probe the data thoroughly. Terms and brief phrases reflected in vivo coding to assign labels to portions of interview scripts (Saunders et al., 2012).

Each interview was regarded as a separate investigation. Flexible working arrangements, childcare system, work-life balance, motivation and lost identity were often used words and phrases. One of the most prevalent themes appears to be organisational culture, ML Policies, HR role in ML and career development; this will require additional examination.

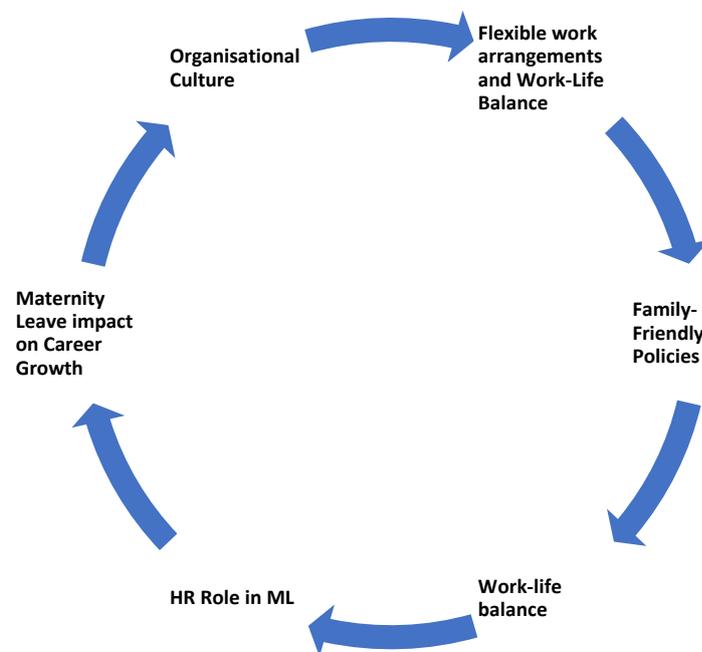
5.3.2 Coding Stage

All growing issues were addressed, with the critical remarks made throughout the interviews being underlined.

Five primary themes emerged from the women's career development linked to ML.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis were used to produce five primary themes.

Figure 7 illustrates the emerged themes and sub-themes



5.4 Theme 1: Organisational Culture

According to Freemantle (2013), organisational culture is a well-known issue, and it may have a substantial influence on welfare and treatment, both favourably and adversely.

For more than eighty years, the phrase ‘organisational culture’ has been used as an explanatory notion in the field of organisational behaviour (Kummerow and Kirby, 2014).

Kilmann et al., (1986) identify culture as an organisation of what personality is to a person, a hidden but unifying theme that provides a purpose, direction, and mobilisation.

According to Schein (2010), it is a pattern of shared fundamental assumptions developed by a group as it handled external and internal integration. Colyer (2000) argues that understanding organisational culture may help companies to analyse performance since businesses adapt to changing conditions depending on their existing culture.

With the research in mind, each participant was asked to describe the dominant culture in their organisations. Different opinions were expressed regarding the group of values and behaviours in an organisation. The results of this study revealed that participants’ perceptions of organisational culture differed. The answers to this question highlighted that four interviewees were satisfied with their organisation culture, describing it as supportive and accommodating. In contrast, P7 called it a customer-focused culture, where the primary focus was on customers rather than employees.

As per Tharenou (2001), mothers progress in the managerial levels at a slower rate than males in identical positions. Moreover, for P8, her company culture was a male dominant and quite hierarchical. As per her experience, it was quite difficult to reach certain managerial positions. There were very few women holding senior positions in the bank; however, on the paper, they promote professional development and equality.

P1 not Irish citizen and P6 Irish citizen described it as typical “Irish”, annoying “who you know’ way of managerial approach and creating the equality and inclusion challenges within the organisation.

5.5 Theme 2: Flexible work arrangements and Work-Life Balance

Without a finely balanced family and work-life, no report on women would be complete, according to Russell, McGinnity, Callan, and Keane (2009). Caregiving responsibilities have a detrimental impact on professional advancement. Corporate culture seldom helps parents who are attempting to reconcile work and family obligations. Employed women have achieved economic independence by breaking out from the conventional patriarchal system of income and marriage support throughout their work-life activities (Gatrell, 2007).

Postponed maternity leave has become common before women believe their careers are in a decent state to take time off (Fortune, 2020). P1 spoke about her economic independence before having the kids; she realised that being a young mother in Ireland was almost impossible. P1 planned her working and personal life. Firstly, she worked hard to reach the managerial position and then have kids; she worked as a manager in a private company during her pregnancy and set flexible policies for herself.

Each participant was asked if their organisations had any flexible working arrangements.

This research has highlighted the different policies within the organisation, as P4 spoke about her department where she had as a manager working mother and she was very flexible towards her needs knowing the challenges of being an employed mother, the manager was supporting her by having FWA, but it was not the same approach for other departments.

Five out of eight participants did not have FWA in their companies, which was a barrier to balancing their personal and working responsibilities.

5.5.1 Family-Friendly Policies

Women find it challenging to strike a balance between work and family obligations (Brue, 2019); as a result, companies must give assistance to women in order to achieve a better work-life balance. The goal of this study is to look at this within the working mothers in Ireland.

Organisations that provide additional security to workers to assist them in managing work and family life, such as flexible working hours, working from home, the earlier leave will have a significant competitive edge when it comes to recruiting and retaining staff (Allen, 2001).

According to a recent UNICEF report, Ireland is one of the weakest positions in Europe for a family-friendly policy (Krung, 2019), and it was noted different times by the working mothers. FFPs aim to help women back into work, and the existence of such policies are fundamental for working mothers. Participants were asked what family-friendly policies mean for them and the importance of the presence of such policies.

Eight working mothers highlighted the importance of FFPs and the main factor of their career progression opportunities.

P2 noted the importance of kids' mental and physical health in society; she did not want her daughter to go to the creche too early. For that reason, she extended her ML. Inexistence support from her employer was the main reason for her resignation. Lack of FFP's for P3 was intended as gender discrimination, where women sacrifice their career development to meet the family responsibilities. In theory, work, organisation, and job design all work together to reach companies goal, where a working system is created to satisfy the business requirements and employee motivation (Armstrong, 2014). Indexicality, participants felt that being

supportive by the companies during the new era of their lives is fundamental; having crèches, FWA, and FFPs will help organisations retain employees and increase motivation and engagement.

5.5.2 Theme 3: Work-life balance

In the frame of society, work-life balance is closely linked to a nation's FFPs for the development of a well-rounded existence for all of its workers (Anand, 2021).

The challenge of work-life balance is already the primary priority for many employers and employees, both in the workplace and at home; Human Resource professionals exploring ways to improve their organisations bottom lines, boost employee morale, retain people with vital company expertise, and keep up with workplace changes in today's fast-paced culture (Lockwood, 2003).

WLB and flexible working can be viewed as a collection of practices and a set of discourses. Discourses are more than just means of expressing the world; they can also have an impact on behaviours (Fleetwood, 2006). According to CIPD, WLB plays a valuable role in organisation performance (CIPD, 2003). Participants were asked what work-life balance means for them?

P3 believes that she could balance her work and family life by being productive and spending quality time with her family. Instead, it was very challenging for seven employed mothers to have a work-life; they felt that there was no balance. It was constantly chasing the tail, being exhausted and constantly having the feeling of failing as employee and as a Mother.

P6 highlighted the importance of pay rate by saying that what you earn has to validate the absence from your kids. She feels that she was a motivated employee but did not bring three

kids into the world, not to prioritise them, for her was hard to balance the work-life and family responsibilities.

5.6 Theme 4: HR Role in ML

According to Armstrong (2014), HRM encompasses policies and practices in organisations design and development, personnel resources, learning and development.

The Maternity Policy allows female employees to balance their professional development with family responsibilities ensuring equality and diversity throughout the organisations (ILO, 2014). HR role in ML is crucial; during the past years, various approaches have been taken to make sure that pregnant employees are fully informed on their rights and policies. Each organisation deals with the ML differently aligned with the Maternity Protection Act 2004. An employee's absence due to pregnancy can cause challenges for the company, and it should be planned in advance. ML policy in the workplace will reduce conflict and guarantee that new mothers have enough time to recover and take care of their babies. In Ireland, companies are not legally obliged to provide the paid ML.

Participants had different experiences with HR departments within their organisations, an essential aspect of the answers were the understanding of the role of HR. Two Participants notes that they had not H.R department at work, and business owners managed it. Fifty percent of participants had an excellent experience with HR departments within their organisation. Providing needed documentations and keeping updated pregnant employees on their return-to-work policies was the primary support from HR and it was very appreciated. According to several surveys, both organisations outsource several functions and departments (Kinange and Murugaiah, 2011). However, some evidence suggests that these advantages are not being realised. Furthermore, there is a risk of transferring expertise and insider

knowledge to suppliers; risk could negatively influence employees (Belcourt, 2006). P8 described her experience with the outsourcing HR department (not based in Ireland) as terrible. They made a mistake. She had to correct documentations related Law and make sure to be aligned with Irish law. Surveys

5.7 Theme 5: Maternity Leave impact on Career Growth

The aim of this study is to find out the correlation between ML and women's career development. Having children is one of the most critical events in a women's life that has an impact on her ability to continue working, owing to the conflict between childbearing and female employment, as well as the costs associated with childcare (Willis, 1974; Easterlin, 1980; Brewster & Rindfuss, 2000). The pressure of pregnancy and ML are driving working mothers to downshift their career development. There is also the matter of financial insecurity to consider. Companies are implementing policies and programs to alleviate financial stress among employees (Coury, et al., 2020).

All Participants agreed that gender-based inequities in labour market circumstances must be addressed in order to prevent future increases in women's poverty rates. Working arrangements for women should be more flexible and reflective of their life paths. Flexible working conditions, equal participation of men and women in caring, and the establishment of minimum salaries for carers could help to achieve major career development and better work-life balance.

According to Russell and Banks (2011), how women reintegrate into the workforce following a career gap due to childcare is critical for gender equality in the workplace. As a result,

regulations should be changed to eliminate gender disparities in the workplace by providing alternative roles that lead women to become caregivers and men to become breadwinners.

To the central question of this paper: Does taking Maternity Leave has an impact on women's career development? What are the barriers if there are any working mothers experience in Ireland? All participants mentioned that FWA and FFP's are fundamental for their career growth and the lack of such policies impact their career advancement.

P1 mentioned the importance of M.L policies to be resolved on the Governmental level or by the H.R. professionals to have the best practices. P2 and P3 felt that their career progression was not only posed but was a big step back. They claimed that after the M.L. employer was assigning them straightforward responsibilities, employers just wanted them to resign as life priorities changed after their babies' birth. P5, during the interview, sadly admitted to having the feeling that her career and personal life are sinking in the water.

The feeling of loneliness, supportless, and bewilderment was the least common multiple along with different participants.

P8 got two rejections when she applied for new roles straight after M.L. she feels that rejections were only pregnancy-related excuses and her career was affected by pregnancy.

CHAPTER SIX – DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

The debate will spotlight the main points, restating the research's objective and question.

Identifying the important findings will evaluate the findings in light of current literature by summarizing the consequences for practices and future research.

According to the introductory chapter's in-depth study, there is a correlation between ML and career development; and the literature and theories support it.

6.2 Objectives and Research Question

As per the literature review, this research explored the number of maternity leave effects on women's career progression. The findings in relation to the study objectives research questions are reported in this discussion. Work stress, not the flexible working environment, a lack of supportive policies, and childcare costs in Ireland affect women's career development.

Investigated research question: Does taking Maternity Leave has an impact on women's career development? What are the barriers if there are any working mothers experience in Ireland?

6.3 Key Findings

The study's findings are consistent with Danison and Mishra's (1995) research, which says that culture may have strategic impacts on organisational effectiveness, performance, innovation and retention. Participant's perception of organisational culture was various; it was the first theme to emerge from the research finding. The results revealed that participants had a different interpretation of what organisational culture means for working mothers.

The research findings all agreed with the literature review conclusions that organisational culture was highly essential to individuals who spend most of their workday at work and the impacts on the organisation to reach its full potential. *'Organisational culture is important for*

employees, especially women need to be supported during the ML’ – P3. Having a voice within organisations seemed essential in employed mothers’ experiences, listening and understanding. *‘I can express myself, managers listen to the employees, but then they do nothing for us, that the culture in my organisation’* said P7. Employee voice refers to the process through which employees convey their opinions to their managers and exert influence over issues that impact them at work. It assists employers in developing open and trustworthy connections with their employees, which can contribute to organisational success (CIPD, 2021). P8 had clear communication with her manager, and she believes it was a key factor of a successful relationship *‘I had clear communication with my manager, but HR in my experience was only background support’*.

More than half of the participants mentioned that they could express their opinions, but they were not involved in decision-making processes.

The research confirmed the importance of work-life balance for working mothers, this theme includes work-related stress and flexible working arrangements. As per Pandu and Shankar (2018), work-life balance is directly linked with job satisfaction. *‘We spend 60% of a day working, having the healthy work-life balance is crucial, even if you are not a mother. Work-life balance is directly proportional to the job satisfaction’* – noted P5.

Working mothers have mentioned the importance of such policies at the workplace to support women and help them come back to work after the ML. P7 *‘FFP’s are fundamental in career growth for women. I personally believe that equality between genders is a crucial factor in understanding both parents’ needs’*.

Family-related responsibilities are another aspect and matter of family members help in returning to work and career progression. Women’s adaption tactics include using sick

leaves, annual leave, and prolonged maternity leave to a more considerable extent and using housekeeping and childminding services as handy assistance.

Relevant literature was analysed on ML policies in Ireland, which may affect career development, personal and family life. The key findings of the study on the elements impacting the employed mother's career development in Ireland.

It is inferred that the lack of flexible working arrangements and family-friendly policies are challenges women employees face. P5 expressed, *'Nursing has been my life, and I have been a motivated employee, after having kids, I decided to become full-time mothers, have a feeling that I lost my identity'*.

The research reveals that employers of the interviewed females do not have a good guideline that can help and support their career growth. A significant number of participants feel that HR participation in ML and back to work procedures can be beneficial. The role of HR within their organisations seemed to be on an administrative level instead of gathering the employee voice, analyse and work on policies to motivate and retain the women employees. The reality for P1 was different compared to her colleagues *'I hold a managerial position, and company gave me flexible working hours'*.

P5 said that *'Due to the lack of support towards working mothers, I felt alone and decided to pursue my career development'*.

The study's first objective regarding the ML and career development as a complex part of H.R.M. has found the importance of ML policies for the organisations and employed mothers. Therefore, organisations need to become more strategic and proactive in their approach towards ML policies and effective workplace planning (CIPD, 2009).

The study's second objective found the connection between ML and career development; eight interviewed women aged 30 to 45 across the different industries in Ireland stated that their progression has paused due to the ML. Participant 6 has never returned to work and spoke about lost identity and confidence; she decided to become a full-time mother. Comparing the childcare costs and earned salary was not worsted.

This research determined the policies that support women, improvements that H.R.M. may implement in order to improve the ML policies. Most participants noted that the lack of HR policies and working arrangements affected their decisions to return to work and their career development.

An affirmative answer to the research question 'Does taking Maternity Leave has an impact on women's career development? What are the barriers if there are any women experience in Ireland?' is attained, stating that ML impacts women's career development. Not paid maternity leaves from the organisations, insufficient government support, and inflexible working options and family activities increase their stress level.

According to the data shown above, reforms that HR policies are required to enhance work-life balance, as Shravanthi (2015) explained, HR policies are necessary for maintaining a work-life balance. A purposive sampling approach was used in this study, and while the results cannot be generalised, trends are emphasised in this discussion.

This study aims to be beneficial for employers and employees. From an organisational standpoint, they are ensuring the involvement of the HR department in policy-making processes and providing flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, particularly for women employees. Failure to offer this may result in worse employee satisfaction or

performance at work, impacting the organisation's profit. It is critical to recognise the importance of balancing work and family obligations.

CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to give an insight into working mothers career development in Ireland.

The current study's significant findings respond to the overarching research question, which sought to learn more about the factors that impact women's career advancement in Ireland.

To accomplish so, thematic analysis was used to investigate the main research question and objectives. The main findings revealed that various factors such as ML policies and benefits, family-friendly policies, organisational approach toward maternity payments and work-life balance affect women's career advancement in Ireland.

Research question: Does taking Maternity Leave has an impact on women's career development? What are the barriers if there are any working mothers experience in Ireland? This research has found that seven participants feel that their career development has been paused due to maternity leave; this was affected by different factors such as lack of flexible working arrangements, work-life balance, administration level of support from human resources professionals. Participant 1 noted *'Feeling of failure at work and home, was tough time'*, and P4 *'I had to postpone my career development, felt lost'*.

This paper highlighted the importance of HR policies in the workplace that can support working mothers. P2 stated, *'It was clear that my company did not want me anymore and there were no HR policies to defend me, they were pushing me to leave as my life priorities have been changed after giving the birth'*.

As a result, policymakers developing ML policies should examine the health and welfare consequences and the larger economic ramifications. The data suggest that the length of ML and the quality of payment influences career development. P6 highlighted *'What you earn has to validate your kids' absence and help keep the work-life balance.'*

Mothers have traditionally been seen as the significant nurturers, which has frequently proven to be a career disadvantage for women in the 'childbearing' year (McIntosh et al., 2012).

P4 became a full-time mother as she was not supported by the company *'Feel that my personal life and career are both sinking'*. All organisations should strive for a healthy balance between work and non-work life; this will help them bright people and retain current competent personnel in order to maintain a productive workforce.

7.2 Research limitations and future research

According to Saunders et al. (2009), it is pretty common to have a specific limitation, regardless of whether it is a qualitative or quantitative research method. This study does not attempt to generalize its findings because it was conducted utilizing purposive sampling. The study was limited to Ireland's geographical region, making it culture-specific. The sample is gender-specific as it is limited to employed mothers age 30-45.

As per Grinyer (2001), researchers must be careful about maintaining participants anonymity, gathering responses, conducting interviews were challenging due to the current Pandemic

circumstances. Working mothers were significantly affected by high stress during lockdown periods; frequent reminders had to be sent and re-schedule interviews.

There were a few drawbacks to this research. The study's emphasis was narrowed because it only looked at working mothers aged 30 to 45 years old in Ireland. The data may not be as accurate as data from a larger sample of participants due to the limited number of participants. As per Bailey (1978), researchers identify the population first, then the specific study group to work with; novice researchers, on the other hand, begin by selecting the smallest group study group size and work their way up to the population.

Costing and pricing are the parts of research processes. If this study were to be reproduced in the future, a bigger sample size would be required to get more reliable results. Because this paper focused solely on the women, future replications might include males and females to provide a comprehensive picture of work-life balance in Ireland and their participation on Parental leave; and the involvement of HR professionals to examine their point of views on FWA, FF policies and Parental Leave related costs for the companies.

7.3 Recommendations

Unpublished stories related to ML effects in Ireland have been analysed and evaluated by interviewing eight employed mothers. Based on research findings, the following recommendations are made to improve current practices.

Creating support groups for employed mothers might be beneficial to continue their career development and make them feel part of the company. The support team can provide the different upskilling pieces of training, implement back-to-work policies to encourage the

working mothers to continue career growth, and create a safe place where the employee voice is listened to and enhanced.

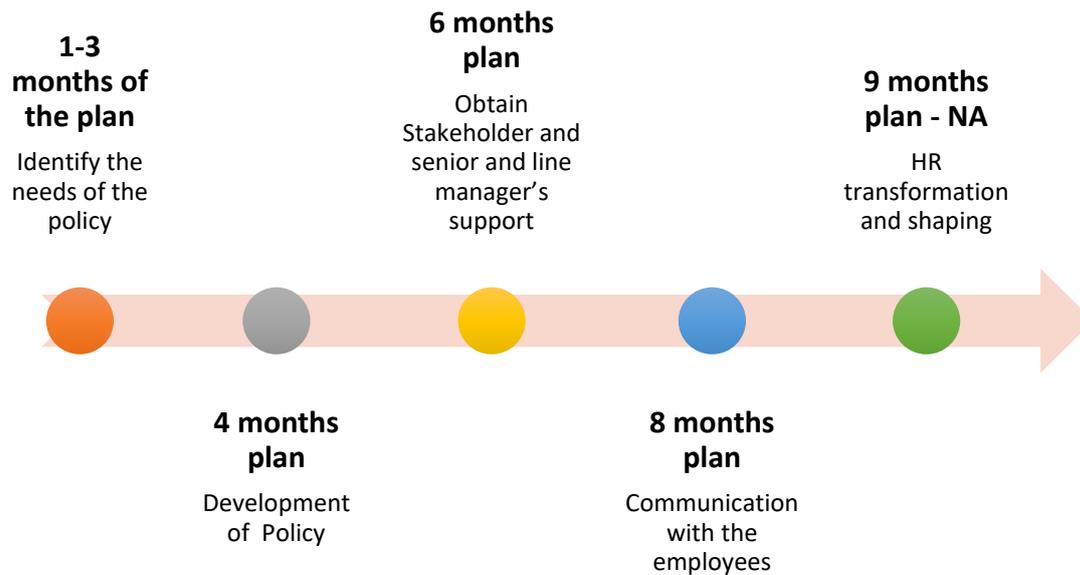
From the company perspective, cheap and straightforward actions can be undertaken to improve and make easier life for the women during the ML.

Different articles have highlighted the importance of a support group as mentioned in the Harvard Business Review (2018); the creation of a support group is a cost-saving initiative that could enhance and represent a supportive environment for all the women, it can be conducted within the office and also online, breaking down distances, WFH will not be a limitation. Moreover, another indirect benefit is related to the reputation and the brand values that the companies promote. It will improve the recruitment process to attract candidates and, on the other hand, will be beneficial to retain talents.

Another recommendation could be the design of an ad-hoc plan to allow a smooth re-integration after the ML. The synergy between line managers and HR could bring to a path to follow, allowing the gradual re-integration in the company of the women, which they passed through a challenging period of time, that revolutionized their personal life and priorities. Companies are compelled to bear the whole financial burden of developing such policies. The cost for back to a work project will be not high since the plan will last 3-4 months. It is not a long-term plan.

The main target is to allow a gradual resumption of work, allowing the detachment from the mother figure without compromising the delicate family balance.

Below is represented the timelines based on the findings of this research and associated costs.



Implementation of ML policies to guarantee working mothers support, organisational culture, FWA and FFP's need to be planned and seen from the employers as retention strategy and success of employers' brand. From the company perspective, the main target is to maximise the profit containing the internal cost that could impact the financial balance without excluding the creation of a healthy, supportive environment for the employees. Employees represent the company's engine; therefore, the creation of the ML policies needs to be considered not as a cost but as the resource to retain skilled working mothers and not lose the know-how gained. The plan would include an awareness of the demands of the workforce. It would benefit both organisations and employees to develop ML policies to support work-life balance and career development. Flexible working arrangements, family-friendly policies, allowance, and ML duration are the key factors for long-lasting relations in the workplace. Companies have to support, motivate and retain professional working mothers.

In the first place, additional study on the economic impact of prolonged maternity leave on women, families, businesses, and society as a whole is required. HR departments within the

organisations should consider complementary programs to facilitate the ML by introducing FWA and work-life balance for working mothers. In addition, protections are to be put in place to ensure that employers and employees equally benefit from such policies.

7.4 CIPD Personal Statement and Reflective Journal

This dissertation is the final step of the National College of Ireland's MA Human Resources Management Program.

Besides the different challenges throughout the master's program, I have discovered my weaknesses and strengths while obtaining essential HR expertise. This research has aided in the development of my primary and secondary research abilities. I enjoyed performing my study on employed mothers, their career developments and HR role in implementing the ML policies. Analysing and evaluating the answers of each woman, their dedication and challenges between work and personal responsibilities was a good example for my personal development. Research has highlighted the importance of support and understanding of women. I had a feeling that they needed to talk, freely express themselves and feel that they have the Voice within the company.

This study increased my knowledge of ML leave policies in Ireland and the EU and other challenges, leaving me with a desire to continue gaining and learning new information in these areas in the future.

Throughout this research, I was working and studying from home due to the current global pandemic environment. I had to ensure adequate time management to keep a healthy work-study-life balance. Time has been a massive challenge for participants too, I had to lead the

interviews very late nights and early mornings due to the working and personal responsibilities of interviewees.

I chose a qualitative research method which turned to be quite challenging in terms of organising the interviews. To solve this obstacle, I devised a task and timeframe Gantt chart. This helped me achieve the rigorous deadlines I set for myself; it has taught me numerous life lessons, like task prioritization, time management, and the capacity to focus and gather knowledge from various sources.

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APPENDIX 1 – Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

This template is designed primarily for those doing qualitative interviews with adults from non-vulnerable populations and dealing with non-sensitive topics. |

The form would be different in the case of focus groups or quantitative research. If conducting research with vulnerable populations and / or sensitive topics please see Research Ethics Committee website for further details.

The points listed on the template below are for illustration only. You may alter the wording to suit your project as you see fit.

A consent form is not simply about a person giving you permission to involve them in research, it is an agreement between the researcher and the research participant outlining the roles and responsibilities they are taking towards one another throughout the whole of the research process.

The researcher should retain one copy of the consent form signed by both themselves and the participant. The participant should also be given a copy of the consent form as a record of what they have signed up to.

Even if a person has signed a consent form consent should still be re-established at the point of doing the interview.

[Title of project]

Unpublished stories regarding career development during and after maternity leave: an analysis of employed mothers in Ireland.

Consent to take part in research

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within

two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves...[outline briefly in simple terms what participation in your research will involve].

-
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
 - I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
 - I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
 - I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
 - I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in...[[list all forum in which you plan to use the data from the interview: dissertation, conference presentation, published papers etc.].
 - I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in [specify location, security arrangements and who has access to data] until [specific relevant period – for students this will be until the exam board confirms the results of their dissertation].
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for [specific relevant period – for students this will be two years from the date of the exam board].
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Kristine Lezhava, student National College of Ireland, Master of Arts in Human Resource

Management. Contact email: x18207065@student.ncirl.ie

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Kristine Lezhava

Signature of researcher

Date

APPENDIX 2 - Questions for the semi-structured interviews.

Employee background

1. In what industry did you work during your pregnancy?
2. Did you work in the private or public sector?
3. How big was the organisation? How many people worked in the organisation?
4. Was it an Irish or U.S. organisation?
5. What was your role in the company?
6. What was/were the reasons you stayed in your company?
7. Are you the main caregiver in your household?

Company Background

8. How would you describe the dominant culture in your old organisation?
9. How did your organisation promote professional development?
10. Does your company have any flexible work schedules? (before and after Covid-19)
11. Describe your benefit package: Pension/Health insurance/ AL/ ML, and etc?
12. Do you feel that there were career growth opportunities?
13. How often did your manager give feedback on your performance?
14. Did you feel you had a voice in your company?
15. What motivated you?
16. In your opinion, did men and women have the same opportunities in your company before – After your pregnancy?

Maternity Leave Related Experiences

17. Do you think a good childcare system is an important factor in allowing you to go back to work? Why?
18. Does your company offer any kind of childcare?
19. How did you feel when the first time you communicated being pregnant?
20. Did you face any barriers during the pregnancy? If yes, please explain.
21. How did H.R. facilitate your ML?
22. Did you apply/consider new opportunities during pregnancy? Why?
23. How was facilitated by H.R. your return to work?
24. Did you consider not returning back to your company? Why?
25. Did you feel that your career progression was paused during or after ML?
26. Did you feel during/after ML, you have been excluded from certain networking groups? Restricted opportunities?
27. What is the work-life balance for you? Your understanding?
28. Do you think that it is essential for organisations to have family-friendly policies? If yes or not? What were your experiences?
29. Did your company offer Flexibly working arrangements during-after ML? If yes, what kind?
30. Did you consider taking a career break? If yes, why?
31. How did you feel being on ML? being left apart from the company?
32. How was being back? New systems, new colleagues.
33. Do you feel your career development has paused since having a child?

