



**THE DADDY OF ALL DILEMMAS: RESEARCH INTO THE  
WORK-LIFE BALANCE DEFICIT PARADIGM AMONGST FATHERS**

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## ABSTRACT

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Debates on work-life balance have historically centered around women. Practically all of the literature verifies that women account for more take up rates of flexible working than men. This practice entrenches traditional gender roles.

To examine reasons for the poor take up of work-life balance policies amongst fathers, I conducted exploratory research through interviews with six fathers from broad occupational groups.

Drawing on these interviews, the findings revealed that financial matters remain one of the main considerations in deciding who stays at home with the children. Furthermore, it was uncovered that being a provider remains at the heart of a fathers' moral fibre and that workplace culture can have a negative effect on a fathers desire to progress his career through education.

However, other aspects of fatherhood mentioned as more important than breadwinning were spending time with the children, acting as a role model and teaching them right from wrong.

To address these concerns, there is no doubt that the norms associated with the traditional male breadwinner role will need to change also. One way of doing this would be to increase the length of paternity leave to match maternity leave. This would send a clear message that mothers are no longer seen as the primary caregivers and fathers are no longer seen as the primary earners.

## **DEDICATION**

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to the loves of my life Michelle, and my two wonderful children, Jamie and Andy.

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Writing this thesis has been an interesting and rewarding experience. It is an honour for me to thank those who made it possible.

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From passing acquaintances – fathers I bumped into in the library or whilst socialising, the stories they shared with me have contributed to the ideas I explored in the following pages. I am especially indebted to the six fathers' who participated in the research, without their honest and frank opinions this research would not have been possible.

I owe my deepest gratitude to Michelle's mother Marie Bierney, and my own mother Brigid Hatchell for their unconditional childcare support.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 Research Problem

Debates on work-life balance have historically centered around women. However, in the latter part of the 1990s and early part of this decade there was a burgeoning of research in the literature on fathers in the workplace - from the UK and the USA in particular. The literature identifies fathers as under researched and insufficiently catered for within policy. It also notes this as a time of transformation and reconstruction with Henwood, (2001) and Lewis, (2000), claiming that many fathers are increasingly seeking to spend more time with their children and participate more in family life.

The research confirms that regardless of employees' gender or family status, the demand to obtain a balance between ones work and private life is much wider, and that this demand is likely to expand rather than contract in the future. This explains the increased attention being shown in the issue of work-life balance.

Practically all of the literature verifies that women account for more take up rates of flexible working than men, confirming their traditional caring roles and dominance of the part time workforce. Whereas, men continue in roles where no loss of earnings are involved (OECD 2003, Drew *et al.* 2003, Fine-Davis *et al.* 2004). This practice entrenches traditional gender roles and, according to Smithson and Stokoe, (2005) the assumption remains that flexible working and work-life balance are predominately issues for 'working mothers of young children'.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The ultimate purpose of my research is to find out why fathers do not demand greater access to, and make greater use of, family-friendly policies and practices in their employment. This can only be understood in relation to fathers' conception of what it means to be a father.

Therefore the research explores issues such as men's attitudes towards their role within the family, how involved they are at all levels of family life, what dilemmas they face, and whether they would like to see changes in their role either within the family or at work.

I will explore the phenomenon of work-life balance from a fathers' perspective. The lack of understanding of this phenomenon provided the impetus for this research.

## **1.3 Background to the Study**

The concept of work-life balance and quality of life issues has never been more topical. Changing employee expectations, developments in information and communication technology, increases in females working, dual earner households, the health and safety risks associated with working long hours and concerns about staff turnover have prompted legislation amendments and brought this issue into sharper focus, with governments and businesses across a number of continents creating new and innovative policies to ensure it is taken seriously.

Family-friendly work-life balance options are important as an ageing population means that many of today's workers face the dual responsibilities of having to care for children and parents. Working flexibly conjures up a whole plethora of practices such as 'term-time' and 'compressed hours' (see checklist in appendix one for a full list). The introduction of these gives employees an opportunity to juggle these demands.

Another factor in raising awareness of work–life balance was the events of 11 September 2001. The tragedy in the USA, and its connection to the workplace, brought home the fragility of life and time on a huge scale. As a consequence, people made conscious decisions to spend more time doing what they felt were important.

Research into fathers at work can be traced back to the early 1970's, and in particular to Sweden, where paid parental leave was first introduced in 1974. This included an option for fathers to take paternity leave following the birth of their children.

In the UK the first inquiries into work and fatherhood were found in research by Rapoport and Rapoport (1976), Pleck (1979) and Moss (1980). Discussions about sharing family duties was publicly aired for the first time during the early 1980s following the establishment of The European Community Equal Opportunities Unit. But it wasn't until the early 1990s that the role of men made it onto the agenda.

In 1992 the Council of Europe's Ministers issued a public statement declaring that, 'member states should promote and encourage increased participation by men [in the care and upbringing of children], in order to achieve a more equal sharing of parental responsibilities between men and women'.

The debate that followed this statement led to legislative changes in some countries. Again the precedence was set in Scandinavia, in particular in Denmark, where paid parental leave was extended from 10 weeks to six months for each parent, with a further six months dependent on employers' approval.

A definite growing trend emerged among fathers in the workforce to seek a better match between their work and family commitments and with this came an increased expectation for more active fathers. According to Daly (2004), this trend may be influenced by a cultural shift that embraces fatherhood and men's involvement with their children.

It is therefore quite remarkable to think that in Ireland in 2010, fathers still have no legal right to paternity leave, despite the classification by many authors on the subject of Ireland as a country having a 'strong' male breadwinner and a poor public childcare system.

According to Pocock (2009), who praised fathers who sought a balance between work and home:

in our labour market, we often think that there's one way to be. A lot of us believe there is a culture that proper workers don't step back,' she said. 'But we all have a life cycle. And when Brett Lee (Australian cricketer) has got children under 10, they're only under 10 once.

#### **1.4 The Importance of Work-Life Balance**

It has been claimed by Pillinger (2001) that, 'work-life balance is increasingly being viewed by the European Union as central to the quality of working life, to employment rates, to competitiveness and growth, to the broader European social model and equality'.

Gatrell and Cooper (2008) have emphasised the importance of work-life balance from a fatherhood and flexibility perspective, where they point to existing research that views professional fathers as likely to be highly conflicted due to the long working hours culture associated with employers and the resultant dilemma they face as they seek to spend more time with their children.

### **1.5 Personal Interest**

I have a personal interest in this topic from a period in my life when I became a father for the first time in 2004. At this time I was trying to juggle a demanding job, study part-time and maintain my leisure interests. I did avail of paid paternity leave (5 days), unpaid parental leave, flexi-time and flexible hours, thinking rather prematurely that I was setting a trend for other fathers to follow suit. But I was overwhelmingly in the minority. I therefore want to understand why more fathers do not follow suite in an age when there has been a dramatic shift in men seen as the sole bread winner and with the onus increasingly on men in general to seek and to achieve a more equitable balance between working and non-working life.

I am interested to find out whether the sceptre of recession has cut through the issue of work-life balance for fathers? With layoffs and reductions in hours and pay does the work side outweigh the importance of the life side even more, and so present opportunities for trying to work and live differently?

I am undertaking this project because I am curious as to whether my research will provide fresh insights into the gender imbalance that exists, or whether it will add to the existing evidence that work-life balance remains predominately an issue for 'working mothers of young children'.

## 1.6 Methodology of Literature Review

This involved a systematic review of literature sources in relation to work and fatherhood in terms of the dilemmas fathers' face in trying to balance work and family life, and the role they play in families.

However, in an attempt to put the role of fathers and employment into context, it is important to discuss how the concept of work-life balance has evolved to such a level that fathers are now part of the debate. Hence, my literature review begins by taking a look at the drivers for work-life balance policies and what kind of debates have emerged. Particular emphasis is placed at this stage on the factors promoting the introduction of family-friendly arrangements. I then review the benefits to organisations before discussing the legal context of work-life balance.

My review of the literature involved searches of electronic databases including: Proquest, SAGE Journals Online, EBSCO Academic Search Complete and a thorough search of reputable academic journals - in particular the excellent publications *Gender, Work & Organisation* and *Work, Employment & Society*.

My searches also brought me to review some of the publications from the various think tanks such as the *Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)*, the *Fatherhood Institute* and the *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*. I learned very quickly the importance of keeping records of the relevant articles so that I could refer to them at a later date. I also learned how useful it was to use alternative spellings and synonyms when doing online searches.

This thesis draws on a number of secondary data research reports such as surveys, cross sectional and longitudinal studies and interpretation of this data was guided by my research questions.

As noted earlier, there was a burgeoning of research in the literature on fathers in the workplace in the latter part of the 1990s and early part of this decade, from the UK and the USA in particular. Accordingly, my review largely concentrated on this period and in these countries and so was selective in nature.

In reviewing the literature I quickly realised that my topic spanned several genres, including psychology, sociology and equality but when I began to recognise the same references appearing in the existing body of knowledge, I knew I was making progress regarding my literature review.

My approach in reviewing the literature was not just to go into it with an open mind. Rather, I approached it in a critical fashion constantly questioning why someone said what they said.

### **1.7 Scale and Scope of the Study**

Considering the purpose of my research I immediately became aware that my research question would require rigorous investigation. Therefore, readers should bear in mind that the essence of this project was exploratory in nature, both in its focus and the methods employed. The great advantage of exploratory research is its flexibility. It allowed me to gain an insight into and become familiar with my subject, as well as giving me excellent guidance on what future research should be.

Remembering that exploratory research rarely provides conclusive answers, my findings manage to provide a preliminary benchmark of a range of fathering beliefs and practices, which future research can develop further.



Importantly though, interpretation of the findings needs to be tempered by the limitations detailed in section 3.9 and conclusions drawn are particularly tentative. However, I do at least hope that my findings will provoke debate in this fascinating field of study.

### **1.8 Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter one provides an explanation of the problem I have set out to address, along with details of the purpose of my research project. It looks into the background of work-life balance stating why it is important and then justifying reasons for my particular investigation.

Chapter two begins with a look at the theoretical concepts about fathers in the workplace, and their roles at home, by drawing on existing national and international literature. I elaborate on the schools of thought and debates currently featuring in academic research, and how they are translated into the theoretical framework, as well as giving my own opinion. I also examine how the previously published research has informed my research questions.

In Chapter three I will provide an appropriate research design, clearly outlining my rationale for choice that will evidently answer my research question. In this section I also give consideration to alternative methodologies.

Chapter four presents the findings from my empirical research by concentrating on a detailed and mainly qualitative analysis of in-depths interviews with six fathers from various professions in Wexford Town.

Finally, Chapter five sets out the conclusions, challenges and policy implications arising from the study. I also highlight issues that further research can develop, including a hypothesis that I developed as a result of my research.

An extensive bibliography of national and international references is also provided at the end of the thesis.

It is important to point out from the beginning, that the concept of work-life balance informing my research was not only from a family-friendly perspective but, in particular, as a phenomenon pertinent to fathers.

My contribution to the debate is contained in this thesis. It is the culmination of four months of research. I started this research three months before the recession was technically over (as reported by the Central Statistics Office (June, 2010)). You, the reader, are entitled to ask: isn't this talk of work-life balance a little indulgent when some people are deeply concerned about whether they will ever return to work again? The fact of the matter is that the recession has made these issues all the more critical. This downturn will force many people to reconsider the way we work. As part of that consideration, we need to think about what kind of role we want fathers to play in the future.

I believe therefore that my research is both topical and timely and I hope you enjoy the read.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

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### 2.1 Aims of the literature review

This section begins with an examination of the existing research literature relating to, what are often referred to as, ‘drivers’ - which influence organisations to introduce work-life balance programmes. I also discuss the emerging debates on the topic, before reviewing the benefits to organisations and consideration of the legal viewpoints.

This approach was taken in order to provide a context for a review of the literature in relation to fatherhood and employment, which follows later in this chapter.

As I outlined and critiqued the literature I provided evidence for future policy developments, as well as opening up the debate further by looking at future research questions that can be undertaken.

The following are the aims of the literature review:

- To review and critique the literature on work-life balance from a father’s perspective.
- To highlight and synthesise the research issues from international literature as a means of comparing to the situation in Ireland.
- To develop a research question(s) and propose a methodology that will clearly answer it.
- To tell a coherent story.

This literature review is presented in the context of what is already known.

For the purpose of this study, I take a very broad concept of work-life balance, defined by Clark (2000), as ‘satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict’.

## **2.2 Drivers for work-life balance policies**

In researching various employer surveys, Evans (2001), found that some employers believed in the value of family life and therefore recognised their employee’s needs for a work-life balance (in Drew *et al.* 2003),

It has been claimed by Drew *et al* (2003) that a major concern of employers’ who want to remain competitive is the recruitment and retention of staff. The authors add that the driver for this has come from an increase in demand for greater flexibility in the workplace.

Furthermore, the Work-Life Balance Network (2004) report that the level of demand in the public sector is two-fold. It comes not only from the employee’s, the majority of which are female, but also from the general public who seek extensions to opening hours. In fact, a common finding from the OECD countries is the lead taken by the public sector in implementing work-life balance policies, a finding which is substantiated in Ireland.

Additionally, research carried out by Fine-Davis *et al* (2004) found that a determining factor in the health and well being of employee’s was the degree of flexibility available to them in their organisations.

### **2.3 The emerging debates**

Increasingly the debate in relation to work-life balance has emerged from the perspective of family-friendly working arrangements. As noted in Kodz *et al* (2002), ‘Individuals with childcare and eldercare responsibilities, clearly have particular needs. Nonetheless, many employers now recognise that options to work flexibly should be available to all employees, not just those with caring responsibilities’.

The Forum on the Workplace of the Future (2005) make a similar point, claiming that work-life balance programmes may also appeal to other groups of employee’s and not just working women.

This changing perception can be attributed to a number of causative factors: One the one hand, the nature of the family - for which working arrangements are seeking to be flexible - is changing dramatically in many advanced economies. On the other hand, there is growing recognition of the importance of individuals’ health and welfare and of the achievement of an effective work-life balance in their own lives. Likewise, Drew *et al.* (2003), suggest ‘that personal fulfilment is important inside work, and that satisfaction outside work may enhance employee’s contribution to work’.

However, Hogarth *et al* (2001), in analysing UK Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS, 1998), found that while 90% of employers agreed that people work better if able to balance home and work effectively, this did not necessarily translate into availability of family-friendly working arrangements.

While 62% of organisations do permit staff to occasionally vary their usual hours of work, indicating a certain ad hoc flexibility, ‘the proportion of workplaces providing flexible working time arrangements other than part-time employment was small’ (Hogarth *et al*, 2001). Furthermore, Evans (2001), with reference to the four countries studied, notes that ‘there is little clear evidence of significant growth in family-friendly arrangements’. Overall, he finds that family-friendly working arrangements are most common in the public sector, probably due to a higher overall proportion of women employees and the absence of market pressures. Within the private sector, flexible arrangements are more likely to be present in larger, unionised firms or in companies with higher proportions of professional or technical employees, and firms with structured, hierarchical management systems.

The varied choices and take up of these arrangements between the public and private sector in Ireland at present remains an ongoing debate.

Both Hogarth *et al* (2001) and Evans (2001) highlight the fact that the most common form of flexible work arrangement is changes in working hours, such as part-time working or flexi time. While a significant proportion of firms also offer short duration special leave arrangements (e.g. to care for a sick child), the possibility of job sharing and term-time working are far less common (6% and 7% of firms respectively in the Hogarth *et al* research).

The dramatic increase of women in the labour force has also brought the issue of work-life balance, often for family reasons, to the forefront. However, according to Drew *et al* (2003), this has been surpassed by dual income households.

While in the past, firms functioned on the notion that most of their employees had no family or other important commitments likely to clash with their jobs; it is now well recognised that domestic responsibilities sometimes conflict with work duties and vice versa.

Trends throughout the OECD are mirrored in Ireland, with growing numbers of persons with caring responsibilities present in the workforce. But the situation is further aggravated in Ireland due to the lack of statutory provisions for flexible working, and the high cost of childcare. This leads many fathers to feel that their jobs are irreconcilable with family life, which has resulted in the need to consider flexible working arrangements.

In countries with quite extensive legislation promoting work-life balance, attitudes within organisations are still of great importance. In extreme cases, some organisations may be unwilling to permit their staff to exercise their legal right in relation to caring responsibilities. Nevertheless, many firms, for business or other reasons, do complement legislation with a variety of often 'family friendly' working arrangements.

The importance of going beyond what is legally available to employees is emphasised by Bevan *et al* (1999). They define such arrangements as 'formal or informal terms and conditions that exceed the statutory minimum, designed to enable an employee to combine caring responsibilities with employment'. Evans (2001) in defining family-friendly working arrangements as 'arrangements, introduced voluntarily by firms, which facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life' emphasises the proactive role adopted by some firms. However, he adds that the definition is not always easy to apply in practice. In particular, it is not always obvious which working arrangements facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life and which do not.

The Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT) hold a similar view suggesting that to be categorised as ‘family friendly’, flexible work arrangements must be genuinely directed towards the needs of employees and mutually agreed by employers and employees.

Although, Los and Gorz (reported in NWW1, 2002) argue that flexibility per se is not indicative of family friendliness. Using British Labour Force Survey data, they point to the fact that while two-thirds of all new jobs created during the 1990s were taken by women, many of these were part-time and ‘by definition almost exclusively insecure, poorly paid and in some instances without the full quota of employment rights that full-time positions traditionally attract’.

Equally, Walby (1997), has argued that the growth in flexibility has been heavily reliant on women being available for part time positions, and as a result leaves them susceptible to poor pay and conditions.

Nevertheless, a particularly comprehensive list of family-friendly working arrangements is to be found in Evans (2001). In his paper for the OECD’s Labour Market and Social Policy Series, he divides flexible work arrangements into four main groups:

- leave from work for family reasons;
- changes to work arrangements for family reasons;
- practical help with caring responsibilities;
- relevant information and training.



Evans explains how all four types of family-friendly arrangements can be of considerable assistance for work/family reconciliation.

However, as highlighted by Hojgaard (in Fine-Davis *et al* eds., 2002), the ease with which parents combine work outside the home with family commitments does not solely depend on the attitudes and policies of their employer. In discussing the Danish experience, Hojgaard highlights other key factors that contribute to the ease with which working parents can reconcile work and family commitments. In particular, she emphasises the extent to which working hours between the sexes are evenly distributed; the availability and cost of quality childcare and the general workplace culture and its attitude towards measures for reconciling work and family life.

Family-friendly working arrangements have traditionally been developed to assist parents combine work with their caring responsibilities for children. However, it is also increasingly the case that those with 'elder care' commitments are seeking to benefit from flexible working. Kodz *et al* (2002) note that, in the future, a greater proportion of employees will have some sort of caring responsibilities for old and infirm relatives and will need flexible working practices to cope with these.

Although, as highlighted by Philips *et al* (2002), a 'one size fits all policy' approach to flexible working is inappropriate. The needs of those with elder care responsibilities are not necessarily the same as those of parents with young children. In particular, participants in Philips' research favoured a more accommodating interpretation of compassionate leave and more opportunities to work from home.

## **2.4 Benefits to organisations**

Further initiatives aimed at persuasion highlight the benefits to organisations of adopting flexible working arrangements. These can be grouped under four headings:

- business case arguments;
- demographic and labour force change;
- trends in Human Resource Management (HRM) and
- developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

While the first two of these are possibly the best documented (Bevan *et al*, 1999; Kodz *et al* 2002; and Dex and Smith, 2002), trends since the 1990's in respect of HRM and ICT have also promoted the introduction of family-friendly working arrangements.

### **2.4.1 Business Case Arguments**

The operation of work-life balance programmes can be challenging for organisations. The burden of extra administrative work, and the difficulties associated with rostering staff on reduced hours or flexi-time, can be quite difficult.

However, these difficulties can be offset by a number of positive impacts with direct financial considerations – the so-called 'business case'. These benefits include lower staff turnover, reduced absenteeism, improved morale, commitment and production, employer of choice arguments and improved public image.

Research in the U.K. by Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham and Vivian (2000) pointed to the business benefits that can be gained by implementing work-life balance policies, and they suggest that these policies conceivably might be extended nationwide.

Equally, cross-national studies such as that carried out in Austria, Japan and Ireland by the OECD (2003) also report positive outcomes, such as increased productivity and retention of qualified staff, as a result of the implementation of work-life balance policies.

A study by Dex and Smith (2002), through analysis of the UK Workplace Employee Relations Survey, sought to quantify these benefits. The study found that approximately nine out of ten firms who had implemented family-friendly initiatives found them cost effective. Improvements in productivity and performance were linked with the availability of family-friendly working arrangements, including paternity leave.

However, according to Kodz *et al* (2002), quantitative data relating to the costs and benefits of work-life balance initiatives are not readily available. The authors note that employers apparently are not systematically collecting the data they would need to evaluate the costs and benefits of family-friendly working arrangements.

In addition to the availability of family-friendly initiatives it is also important to consider access. As highlighted by Kodz *et al* (2002), the availability of family-friendly working arrangements within an organisation does not necessarily imply that these are offered equally to all members of staff. In many organisations, some options and flexibilities are dependent on grade or length of service.

However, Evans (2001) found evidence that decisions in relation to the introduction of flexible working were taken for a belief in the value of family life. It could be argued therefore, that any costs associated with the implementation of such initiatives might be forsaken for reasons of value.

Nevertheless, empirical evidence on the benefits of family-friendly employment practices remains quite limited (Nasman, 1997). The study found that long-term productivity gains were only reported in one tenth of private sector, and one third of public sector, organisations. Additionally, research by Dex and Smith (2002) found that 44% of employers reported an increase in overall costs to the business as a result of offering work-life balance policies. These mixed results highlight that a certain level of prudence remains with many organisations. Halford (2006) has even concluded that attempts to offer flexible work initiatives can result in a perceived 'threat' to a firm's production and control.

In spite of the positive outcomes noted above, some negative findings are also shown in the literature for both employers and employees. A reoccurring subject matter from Ireland, for example, is the evident gap between what employers need and what employees want.

From an employer's point of view, numerous studies are available which show how to implement work-life balance policies without damaging the business (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005, NCPP 2003, IBEC 2002, Fisher 2000). The literature suggests that employers seek greater levels of support in implementing these policies, with some 60% of employers stating complexity in implementing these initiatives (Drew *et al.* 2003).

On the other hand, findings in Fine-Davis *et al.* (2004) from Denmark note how much easier it is to combine work and non-work commitments. The authors found that this is due to the wide availability of affordable childcare, which is also under the remit of the state, thus affording psychological benefits to employees in the knowledge that there is easy access to these facilities. However, the study also notes that it is more beneficial for men than women to balance their work and private lives because of the gender divide that exists in the workforce. The authors point to ‘The organisation of work, the degree of autonomy at work, the degree that the job is fixed to one place, the ways payment systems are organised, and so on, consistently offer better opportunities for men than for women...’

#### **2.4.2 Demographic & Labour Force Changes**

The rapid increase in women in paid employment has been a huge factor in the advancement of work-life balance programmes. In Ireland, the expansion of the services sector has been attributed to this rapid increase, a view held similarly by Fine-Davis *et al.* (2004) Drew, Emerek and Mahon (1998) and Bakker (1994).

Furthermore, research conducted by Drew and Emerek (1998), Russell, Smyth, Lyons and O'Connell (2002) and Callan (2005) found that the diversification of the labour force in Ireland in recent years was as a result of the return to work of married women in particular, having taken time out to raise children.

Figures from an OECD report in 2003, which looked at Ireland, Austria and Japan, showed that as a percentage of the working population, 55% of females were in employment.

This compared to 75% of males. The difference can be attributed to much more involvement in family activities in general by women. As a result employers have focused more on the needs of employees with caring responsibilities.

The ageing of populations across the OECD is a further significant trend with implications for how work is organised. Increasingly, employers must recognise that employees have responsibilities in respect of old and infirm relatives. A further implication of ageing populations, and the associated decline in young people, is that increasingly employers will need to reconsider their approach to older employees. Pressures for greater flexibility in the workplace are likely to be central to this debate.

Figures from the ILO (2005) show that 85% of all part time workers are women. According to data provided by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2005) women in part time roles outnumbered men by three to one. The CSO figures from the same findings show women in part time jobs increased by 26,000 compared to an increase of just 200 by men - indicating that women make more use of this form of flexible working than men, most probably due to devoting more time to caring duties.

It is often claimed in the literature that much of the initiatives aimed at improving work-life balance are targeted towards women. Possibly one of the reasons for this is evident in figures supplied by the ILO (2005), which confirms that women are responsible for children in single parent households in nine out of ten single parent families.

This in turn impacts on policy, as the greatest demand for work-life balance programmes comes from this group as they attempt to address their childcare needs. Consequently there is lesser significance placed on the work-life balance needs of fathers.

### **2.4.3 Trends in Human Resource Management Practice**

Organisations are more likely to introduce family-friendly programmes if they give priority to the welfare and commitment of their employees (Evans, 2001).

Evans (2001) suggests that other trends in HRM such as a 'long-working hour's culture', are 'not likely to be so favourable'. In many countries this is associated with professional and managerial jobs, and it is very damaging to those seeking to achieve a work-life balance.

One of the great current debates centres around the trend towards the devolution of responsibility for day-to-day HR matters, including flexible working, to line managers. It is this authors' opinion that this has possibly had a negative impact, with non-HR professionals reluctant to become too involved in this area.

### **2.4.4 Developments in Information & Communication Technology**

Modern communications technology, including the Internet, email and mobile phone, enables many employees to work off-site. The term e-working covers teleworking, telecommuting, mobile working, hot desking, satellite offices etc. (IBEC, 2002). In particular, opportunities to work from home potentially aid work-life balance.

Although, to date, there appears to be little evidence of extensive working from home and in the main this flexibility appears to be offered to senior staff (Hogarth *et al*, 2000).

## **2.5 Legislative context**

Information in relation to statutory provisions introduced by governments to promote the reconciliation of work and family life is easily obtained. However, less readily available is data on family-friendly working arrangements which go beyond legal requirements and are introduced voluntarily by firms. While some comparative EU studies do exist (EFILWC 2000), Evans (2001) comments that it is no coincidence that the best statistical information is to be found for countries which have relatively low levels of public provision for child care and limited statutory, leave benefits, for example the US, Australia, Japan and the UK. This stems, in part, from a liberal economic theory that interferences between the State and family life, and indeed in the running of organisations, should not be tolerated.

There are many factors leading to the promotion of family-friendly working arrangements (Humphreys *et al* 1999 and 2000). But the momentum for countries to address work-life balance from a legal viewpoint has come from the EU where minimum standards were set for maternity and parental leave during the 1990's. Some countries - such as France - have gone a step further and improved these minimum standards by mandating a 35 hour working week.

Although, it has been argued by Fine-Davis *et al*. (2004), that this has had the opposite effect, as some businesses have extended their service hours and as a result excluded some mothers from the workforce.



Further evidence from the Fine-Davis *et al* (2004) study suggests that the take up of paternity leave amongst fathers in Denmark increased from 55% in 1991 to 67% in 1999 as a result of a legal entitlement to take up to two weeks of paid paternity leave. This suggests the positive outcomes by aiming policies at fathers.

Similar positive outcomes for fathers were found in Bjornberg (1994) and in Lamb, Chuang and Hwang's (2004) 15 year longitudinal study of paternal involvement in Sweden. They found that taking paternity leave was linked with higher levels of involvement and responsibility and with spending more time with their children during week-days.

By the end of 1999, following an EU Directive in 1996, every employee in the EU was entitled to parental leave. In the UK, legislation was passed in 2003 that gave specific rights to working parents to request flexible working arrangements. It can be argued that this is an encouraging move for all employees as it establishes the legal right to request flexible working.

In Ireland, we have yet to witness radical measures such as that in the UK, France and Denmark. However, there is no doubt that the EU has played a pivotal role in the introduction of initiatives to assist parents with their work-life balance. An example of this is the introduction of parental leave in 1998, which followed an EU Directive in 1995 (OECD 2003: 131).

Whilst these measures are welcomed, the legislation needs to go much further to bring about social change with respect to male employees who are fathers, for example.

The importance of overcoming these challenges has been highlighted by the Forum on the Workplace of the Future (2005: 85):

‘...there is a need to move beyond the current model of prohibition of discrimination to a more proactive stance, which will focus on creating diverse, equitable workplace environments in which all workers are enabled to contribute fully.’

## **2.6 Policy responses to work-life balance**

EU policy has highlighted that work-life balance initiatives are beneficial to promoting equal opportunities. What is more, according to the Lisbon European Council (2001), this would reduce occupational segregation.

The promotion of work-life balance in Ireland gained significant prominence through social partnership. Under the chair of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (renamed the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation in March 2010), The National Framework Committee for Work-Life Balance was established with a view to looking at increasing further provisions for childcare and reviewing parental leave amongst other work-life balance initiatives.

In 2003 The National Centre for Partnership and Performance established The Forum on the Workplace of the Future, following instruction from the Government, and they have targeted work-life balance policies in response to rapid changes in the labour market and economy.

As noted earlier in the case of Denmark, there are successful outcomes to be achieved by directly targeting fathers in the work place. But, from an Irish perspective, the attention given to fathers who seek to achieve a work-life balance has been minuscule by comparison. Likewise, Ferguson and Hogan (2004) have added to this view:

‘...the choices working fathers have around spending time with their children are severely limited. The introduction of paid paternity leave and parental leave is essential to giving men and their partners the choice for the man to go beyond the provider role and be as fully active fathers as possible.’

As highlighted, more and more women have entered the workforce and family dynamics have changed. As a result, men’s roles are changing too. Men are now starting to face the same dilemmas as women have done in recent years i.e. to recognise the trade offs that need to be made between their work life and family life.

The following subsections concentrate specifically on work-life balance from a fathers’ perspective.

## **2.7 The changing role of fathers**

As I mentioned in my introduction, my review of the literature was taken from an international perspective and it is interesting to compare what some authors have said in relation to the changing role of fathers. Bjornberg (1992) has written about fathers emerging as carers from their patriarchal roles, yet, just a decade later Hobson (2002) argued about fatherhood being in ‘crisis’ where men are incapable for caring or providing for their families.

The gender dimension and policy debate on work-life balance has, until recently, predominantly been focused on women. But with the growth in dual income families, a better appreciation of the need to widen the focus to include fathers is emerging. Equally, this view is found in an international context in Haas, Hwang and Russell (2000).

Drawing upon international research by Kimmel (1993) and Griswold (1993) we see the role for fathers changing in a kind of embryonic way, highlighting different forms of involvement with their children. On the other hand, according to Lee and Owens (2002), the roles of parents in industrialised countries have changed little, with fathers continuing in their breadwinning role and mothers fulfilling the primary carer role.

The authors attribute this strong orientation for fathers to work to men's need for self esteem. Likewise, Gaylin (1992) found that nothing replaces work in satisfying a man's need for pride, self respect and status.

According to Daly & Hawkins (2005) the next step in supporting diversity in the workplace is learning to accommodate fathers. One way of doing this is to make it mandatory to offer workplace supports e.g. in the UK, from April 2003, fathers and mothers of children under 6 or disabled children under 18 have a legal right to request flexible working arrangements from their employer.

In 2005 the Australian Industrial Relations Commission refused to allow a large oil company and its contractors to change the shift of oil-rig workers from 7 days on and off to 14 day shifts, ruling that keeping fathers away from their families for extended periods of time is 'not in the public interest' (cited in Daly & Hawkins, 2005, p4).

Research carried out at the University of Lancaster in 1999 on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (cited Warin *et al.* 1999) found fathers are not receiving the support and recognition that they need to combine the role of breadwinner with an active part in home life with their families. It found that fathers, mothers and their teenage children are overwhelmingly convinced that the main contribution men can make to their families is providing an income. This 'traditional' view of 'providing' fathers and 'caring' mothers is deeply entrenched among young people as well as their parents.

What is more, Daly & Hawkins (2005) describe this as a 'revolution in the workplace', adding that the provider role for fathers is more conflicting than ever before. They argue that fathers now have to resolve a different set of demands and constraints to accommodate increasingly complicated family responsibilities.

But, Warin *et al.* (1999) also highlight ways that men are involved in their families that tend to go unrecognised. A 'taxi' service to and from daily activities, informal sports coaching and an opponent for computer games are examples of the interactions that routinely take place between today's fathers and teenagers. Some parents claimed the pressures of work and family were turning men into 'all-singing, all-dancing' superdads.

The report calls for 'fathering' to be given a higher profile, and commends the lead of Scandinavian countries where the positive aspects of father-child relationships are promoted by government; in which a portion of leave time is available only to fathers, higher wage replacement is offered, and information campaigns are undertaken to increase men's participation.

### **2.7.1 Fathers in family life**

Much has been written academically about the morals foremost in modern fatherhood and the shift by fathers to a more involved role with their children (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004; Sandberg and Hofferth, 2001; Bianchi, 2000). Consequently, one of the great debates in the literature is measuring the level of this involvement.

Most of the studies concentrated around levels of engagement, accessibility and responsibility (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine, 1987), as well as time use studies (e.g. Yeung & Glauber 2004) and intensive qualitative studies (Pleck & Steuve, 2001). But in general, most of the literature points to a convergence between mothers and fathers in terms of their involvement with their children.

In commenting on the impact on fathers of more involvement with their children, Eggebeen and Knoester (2001) found for instance that they had a much stronger link to the labour market than non fathers.

Similarly, qualitative studies done by Palkovitz (2002) found more evidence of this impact by reporting less work related stress for fathers who are emotionally involved with their children. Palkovitz further adds that fathers who spend more time with their children even tend to be more involved in community associations.

Furthermore, it has been argued by Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004) that fathers who spend more time with their children voluntarily, as opposed to fathers who have been forced to stay at home and mind the children as a result of involuntary redundancy, for example, is fundamental. The authors add that children tend to benefit far greater from spending more time with their fathers when the decision to do this has been by choice, rather than forced upon them.

A report prepared by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, (2009), offered a new insight into how fathers experience and think about work and care in the UK today. They found that fathers' attitudes towards parenting do not appear to match the reality of their work and care arrangements. Their rejection of traditional views, dissatisfaction with the time they spend with their children and their strong support for extended paternity leave shows a willingness to be involved in the day-to-day care of their children. In practice, however, most fathers still work full time, and many work long hours.

According to research carried out by Eillison, Barker and Kulasuriya (2009), the majority of modern fathers still appeared to conform to the traditional male breadwinner role, although they found that their attitudes towards parenting roles were much more egalitarian.

The research carried out on 2,261 fathers found that although nearly half (47%) of fathers thought that the father's role is to provide; only 23% of fathers (compared to 34% of mothers) thought that childcare is the primary responsibility of the mother. Over half (55%) of the fathers surveyed believed that the parent who is paid more should stay at work, regardless of whether they are male or female. 62 % thought that fathers (in general) should spend more time caring for their children.

### **2.7.2 Where fathers differ from mothers**

Findings from the research conducted by Eillison *et al.* (2009) suggest that fathers and mothers held broadly similar views about work and care. However, they differed on who *has* primary responsibility for childcare; who *should* be responsible for providing financially; and satisfaction with working hours.

For example, fathers were less likely (23%) than mothers (34%) to think that childcare is the primary responsibility of the mother, and more likely (55%) than mothers (41%) to believe that the parent who is paid more should stay at work regardless of whether they are male or female.

Fathers were less satisfied with their working hours than mothers were with theirs: 46% thought they spent 'about the right amount of time' at work, compared to 61% of mothers. However, fathers were nearly three times as likely as mothers to agree that work comes first (17% compared to 6%), and were more likely than mothers to think that they could meet the needs of both work and care (50% compared to 42% of mothers).



Daly & Hawkins (2005) have argued that there are a number of reasons why we should look differently at ‘working fathers’ in comparison to ‘working mothers’. The authors refer to the politics and discourses of workplaces and families, in the seldom discussed importance of fathers for child well-being, and through the important role of workplace culture in facilitating or hindering men’s abilities to meet their families’ needs for care.

## **2.8 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework upon which this research is presented builds primarily on the burgeoning research on fathers in the workplace in the latter part of the 1990s and early part of this decade. In this section I explore those theoretical frameworks most suitable for explaining my findings.

I drew on these concepts to guide my research design and collect the data. It was important to frame the phenomena of my study within the research literature. By taking this approach I was affording myself the best opportunity to provide fresh insights and enhance my knowledge and understanding of the topic. Another reason for this approach was that it helped me to define my unit of analysis, to identify the criteria I was looking for when selecting candidates as part of my research.

A useful theory for conceptualising work-life balance is Clark’s (2000) work-family border theory that aims to explain how people ‘manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance’.

She describes people as border-crossers who move between the spheres of work and family, the same as people move across different countries encountering diverse cultures.

The industrial revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century resulted in a separation of home and work, and with this came the ideology of separate spheres i.e. men went out to earn the crust and women stayed at home to rear the children (Connell, 2005; Smith and Winchester, 1998). This was the tradition until the mid 1990's when dual earner families became the norm.

In depth studies on how women reconcile a balance between work and family commitments are well documented in the literature (e.g. Blair-Loy, 2003; Budig and England, 2001; Crompton and Harris, 1998; Duncan, 2005; Hochschild, 1989, 2001; McDonald *et al.*, 2006; Pocock, 2005; Rasmussen, 2004; Wood and Newton, 2006).

However, on reviewing the limited literature in relation to fathers, it is quite noticeable how much is written about the problems fathers face as a result of separation and divorce and subsequently the nature of their relationship with their children. Conversely, there is in-depth literature available on mothers, and the conflicts they experience when faced with the work-life balance dichotomy. Although, fathers use of parental leave is now part of the public policy debate in many OECD countries (Moss and O'Brien, 2006)

As revealed in my opening line, debates on work-life balance have historically centered around women. Largely because of its connection to the equal rights for women movement, initiatives became associated primarily with mothers rather than fathers. The growth in the numbers of women returning to the workforce and changes in family structures mean that more fathers now share the role of provider (Brannen, Moss, Owen & Wale, 1997, 1997a). This is seen as a massive turnaround in society, and was the context for the increased focus on women in the workforce over the last 25 years or so.

The literature notes that the model of men's uninterrupted full time work has, for a long time, been taken for granted. Although, the naturalised uninterrupted full time work model for men has been questioned by Connell, (1987), and Collinson and Hearn, (2004). As a result, Hörning *et al.* (1995) and Meiksins and Whalley, (2002) have even gone so far as to challenge the whole centrality of work for men.

Fathers, for instance, are no longer satisfied with the outdated concept that women are the sole nurturers within a family. Furthermore, Marsiglio and Pleck (2004) have even suggested that in some situations, 'new men' are to be found in the nurturant father model, which is based on reducing paid work and increasing family time. And, according to Henwood and Proctor (2003) fathers are more concerned in managing the conflicts between working and caring for children.

On the other hand, Singly and Hynes (2005) have described the workplace as largely fixed around the male breadwinner model, which presumes that workers do not have important family commitments. Also, according to Drew *et al.* (1998) the customary role played by fathers in the twentieth century is that of the 'breadwinner'

Similar theories have been expressed by Acker (1998) who claims that 'the ordinary worker is a man, an abstract person who has few obligations outside work that could distract him from the centrality of work'. Equally, Halford *et al.* (1997) have enriched the theoretical discussion on this topic by suggesting that 'men are unencumbered, with no caring duties that require time, focus, energy and loyalty'.

At a bare minimum, allowing more rights to fathers to take leave from work for childcare matters, as an intervention to support work life balance, sends an important signal to society as a whole that fathering support is important during the early years of a child's life.

Recent studies have noted the emergence of new roles for fathers (Brandth and Kvande, 2001, 2002, 2003; Halford, 2006; Hobson, 2002; Kimmel, 2004; Kugelberg, 2006; Marsh and Musson, 2008) These researchers along with others such as Daly, Drew, Fine-Davis, Lamb and Pleck, have all contributed to my understanding of the antecedents in relation to the correlation between fatherhood and employment.

There is no doubt that the course of fatherhood as a social, discursive concept has undergone a variety of changes. Therefore, in understanding these changes it can helpful to consider the past in an attempt to briefly explain its transition, from what it should be to where it is today.

Pleck (1997) has argued that, since the 1800s, fatherhood has been caught in state of ambivalence regarding what the role should be. Amongst the various theories of fatherhood is the suggestion by Cabrera *et al.* (2000) and Pleck (1997) that fatherhood has evolved through the stages of ‘colonial father’, to ‘distant breadwinner’, to ‘sex role model’ to ‘co-parent’.

### **2.8.1 The ‘Colonial Father’**

According to Pleck (1997), fathers were typically viewed on both sides of the Atlantic in ‘colonial’ America and Victorian England, as ‘moral overseers’, with ultimate responsibility for, and influence on, their offspring. Men who did not replicate this image were ostracised socially and financially. Likewise, Tosh (2007) draws attention to the importance of marriage and homestead as central themes in defining masculinity at this time.

### **2.8.2 The ‘Distant Breadwinner’**

The spread of industrialisation saw many fathers head to the cities to earn a living for their families at home, and with it the responsibility of making decisions regarding the upbringing of the children passed to the mother. Many developmental theorists at the time believed that the father-child relationship had little to no impact on children’s advancement (Cabrera *et al.*, 2000) which counter argued the ‘colonial’ supremacy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

### **2.8.3 The ‘Sex Role Model’**

Of huge historic significance was the concept of the importance of a father in raising a child as a ‘sex role model’ (Pleck, 1997). This concept can be traced to claims by prominent military psychiatrists that soldiers who broke down in battle did so as a result of ‘excessive mothering’. This was caused by increases in maternal self-sufficiency due to the absence of so many fathers who went off to fight in the Second World War. As a result, these fathers became iconic figures in the eyes of their children and were seen as ‘towering figures’ (Cabrera *et al*, 2007).

### **2.8.4 The ‘Co-parent’**

Higher paternal participation and the connotation of ‘co-parenting’ began to emerge in the late twentieth century as a result of increases in women returning to the workforce and a greater emphasis on gender equality (Cabrera *et al*, 2007). Consequently, there was a decline in fathers as the sole ‘breadwinner’ and a softening of the ‘sex role model’ imagery of fathers.

### **2.8.5 Contemporary Flexible Fathers – Rhetoric or Reality**

It has been argued by Gatrell and Cooper, (2008), Cartwright and Cooper, (1997) and Hill *et al*, (2001), that the emerging conception of being a father, or more specifically, a good father, is a discursive notion progressive from ‘breadwinner’ and ‘co-parent’. Depending on whether he has availed of work-life balance initiatives, a dad should be flexible enough to both earn a wage *and* be able to help fix dinner and read a bedtime story. However, as posited in my introduction, a gap remains between the availability and take up of flexible work practices amongst fathers.

Therefore, I would argue that the contemporary view of the ‘flexible father’ is more of a rhetoric than reality.

### **2.8.6 How previous empirical research informed my research questions**

Demand for family-friendly working arrangements is consistently shown to be high. In a survey conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies in the UK (reported in Kodz *et al*, 2001) almost 60% of employees felt that they would benefit from more flexible work arrangements, while almost half of respondents agreed that their ‘personal life is significantly limited because of their work’.

However, despite evidence of demand for more flexible work arrangements, including demand from those without caring responsibilities, research evidence suggests that take up of flexible working practices remains relatively low.

In reviewing take-up of family-friendly working arrangements, Kodz *et al* suggest that it is higher among women, among non-professional staff and within the services sector, in particular the public service, and also in organisations where no restriction is placed on eligibility. Overall they conclude that ‘take up of all flexible work arrangements is relatively low within organisations offering such options’ (Kodz *et al* 2001).

**Table 2.1 Take up rates of parental leave by gender (%)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Female take-up rate</b>	<b>Male take-up rate</b>
Austria	9%	2%
Ireland	40%	5%
Japan	58%	0.5%

Source: Taken from OECD (2003). *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*, Austria, Ireland and Japan. OECD: Paris, page 21.

In order to strengthen father's caring roles and to encourage more fathers to take parental leave, Norway, Sweden and Denmark in 1993, 1995 and 1999 respectively, introduced 'daddy periods' which marked a trend of designating a proportion of paid parental leave exclusively to fathers, although the leave is lost if not used, Bjornberg (1994). By 1997 almost 70% of eligible fathers in Norway had taken this leave. By contrast, figures from non-Nordic countries show the level of take up to be about 5% (OECD, 1995).

Bruning & Plantenga (1999), in their study of parental leave across eight European countries, found that when parental leave doesn't have a proportion marked specifically for fathers (the opposite holds in Norway, Sweden and Denmark) then the take up tends to be dominated by mothers. For example, in Belgium, 95% of the take up was by mothers, Deven and Nuelant (1999), and similarly in Germany it was 98% as reported by Rost (1999). Equally, Haas and Hwang (1999) found that a father was less likely to use parental leave if he earned more than his spouse/partner.



Thus, according to (Drew *et al* 2003):

‘...a major challenge to be faced by this gender imbalance will be to avoid a twin track situation, where men are in the fast lane working continuous and often excessive hours in full-time employment, and women in the slow lane working reduced hours or opting for career breaks.’

Fletcher and Rapoport (1996) refer to this as the ‘mommy track’, adding that this leads to gender inequality, where fathers feel they have no choice, and mothers who do have a choice end up paying the price when it comes to their careers. What is more, ‘if this situation continues to develop then it will add to existing evidence that work-life balance is for ‘working mothers of young children’ and therefore should be avoided by all other employees’ (Drew *et al* 2003).

In seeking reasons for this I found the previous empirical research on work-life balance in the literature reflective of gender mix in today’s labour market i.e. quite complicated and difficult to interpret.

I did find many quantitative studies which looked at men and women working in similar occupations, but the results were mixed and varied. For example, some studies have found that women report more work life conflict than men (Frankenhaeuser *et al.*, 1989; Lundberg *et al.*, 1994); yet others found the level of conflict between the sexes to be similar (Eagle *et al.*, 1997; Emslie *et al.*, 2004a; Hughes and Galinsky, 1994; Swanson *et al.*, 1998; Triplett *et al.*, 1999; Winslow, 2005).

On the other hand, one study (Chandola *et al.*, 2004), even noted different results for different countries. Appreciating the difficulty I had in interpreting these studies, the fact remained that they did not tell me anything about why men, and fathers in particular, feel they have no choice when it comes to making greater use of family-friendly policies and practices in their employment. Therefore, in theorising the reasons for this I identified the research questions below.

## **2.9 Research Questions**

1. Why is there such a poor take-up of work-life balance initiatives amongst fathers?
2. How has two years of recession changed father's attitudes towards work and in particular towards their work-life balance?
3. Has work-life balance shed its old image as a working mothers' issue?

I firmly believe that answering these questions will contribute to my understanding of the kind of dilemmas fathers face when trying to achieve a work life balance.

Asking the participants why they do not use parental leave etc was never going to reveal much. I had to explore fathers' conceptions of what it means to be a father. Therefore, as a recourse to what fathers think about work-life balance, I sought to find out about their perceptions, understanding, feelings and attitudes towards their role within the family; how involved they are at all levels of family life, and whether they would like to see changes in their role either within the family or at work.

I originally thought of asking:

1. What can employers' do to address this gap?
2. How effective are work-life balance programmes in the workplace?
  - a. Which ones in particular are most effective for fathers?
3. Are employers monitoring and evaluating these programmes?

However, I changed my mind, because the ultimate purpose of my research was to find out why fathers do not demand greater access to, and make greater use of, family-friendly policies and practices in their employment. Therefore, asking the above questions would not have led me to understand the phenomenon of work-life balance from a fathers' perspective.

## **2.10 Summary of literature review**

This literature review demonstrates that whilst a lot of excellent work has been done to date regarding promoting work-life balance issues, more information is required on the impact these have in relation to fathers.

The extent to which initiatives remain unpaid, such as parental leave, may have an impact on whether fathers avail or not. This may influence the extent to which male employees who are not fathers, but who one day will be, take up these options.

The literature demonstrates that change is needed to the long hour's culture, and managers need training in order to effectively implement, monitor and evaluate flexible working arrangements. Indicators for success and failures are needed.

This literature review suggests fathering support is important during the early years of a child's life. Establishing the 'business case' was deemed to be an important factor in promoting work-life balance. Although, the proportion of workplaces providing flexible working time arrangements other than part-time employment was small

Trends since the 1990's in respect of HRM and ICT have also promoted the introduction of family-friendly working arrangements. Whilst research from Sweden found links between the up-take of paternity leave and higher levels of involvement with children during week-days. Although in practice, most fathers still work full time, and many work long hours.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

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### 3.1 Key Considerations to my Research Approach

I considered the following key questions when designing my research plan:

1. What is the purpose of my research?
2. Who is my audience (for the purpose of my findings)?
3. What kind of information do I need?
4. By when do I need this information?
5. Where would I best source the required information?
6. What methods could I use to collect that information?
7. What resources are available to examine and collect the information?

### 3.2 Identification of Paradigm

In this section I considered what was the best way to answer my research question? I sought to integrate my research purpose, research questions and methods for collecting and analysing the data.

The paradigm which developed my framework of thinking and guided my research was interpretivism. This is because my research question stems from a wish and a curiosity to find out about fathers' attitudes towards their role within the family, how involved they are at all levels of family life, what dilemmas they face, and whether they would like to see changes in their role - either within the family or at work.

As I mentioned in my introduction, I already had a personal interest and was immersed in the whole topic of work-life balance. I wanted to understand the reasons for the poor take up from a small select group of fathers. As Thomas (2009) states: the key to an interpretive study is *understanding*. So, by adopting an empathetic stance I interpreted the actions of these fathers and explored the complexity of their subjective views in order to understand their motives.

In essence, it was an in-depth study of the fatherhood experience, including subjective perceptions, thoughts and feelings. The use of qualitative rather than quantitative data throughout the research enabled themes and patterns in fatherhood to be identified, and it gave a sense of the everyday experiences of the fathers under study.

I remind you that I was not expected to be objective in my study. According to Creswell (1994), this underpins an interpretive study. In fact the personal interest I have in the topic helped me interpret the views of those whom I was interviewing in order to highlight what was going on.

Being a father myself, and using my own knowledge of work-life balance, I believe I was easily able to understand the behaviours of those interviewed by engaging with them and observing their actions. By doing this as far as possible, I was in fact using what Geertz (1975) termed a 'thick description'.

In keeping with my interpretive paradigm, I did not intend to analyse data statistically. Therefore I had no desire to quantify the qualitative data I was collecting. In spite of this, I recognised that qualitative and quantitative data are in fact compatible, and even complementary to each other. For that reason I have presented supplementary quantitative data primarily for the purpose of summarising or clarifying certain issues.

Thus, my research is context bound - and the inductive process that I applied meant that my conclusions were drawn from the empirical research I carried out.

### **3.3 Methodology Defined**

The main challenge for me in choosing my methodology was to ensure that the data I gathered was honest, relevant and reliable.

One of my aims was to seek new insights. I wanted to understand the reasons behind the poor take up of work-life balance initiatives amongst fathers. For that reason, the research was conducted by using in depth semi-structured interviews.

I initially intended to interview eight fathers. However, after the sixth interview I noticed that the answers to my questions were no longer providing me with new data or fresh insights. I had reached saturation point, but was content that I could now classify the data as corroborative evidence.

The interviews were recorded as written notes as well as an audio back-up on an i-phone (with respondents' permission). These were subsequently transcribed for analysis purposes. Interviews varied in length, from 45 minutes to one hour. Verbatim quotes from the interviews are used intact to convey the meaning and the feelings underlying what each father expressed.

The interviews were conducted in the participants' home between 10<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> May 2010.

When selecting interviewees, care was taken to cover those at a range of levels within their organisations and whose children ranged in different ages; including pre-school, primary school, secondary school and one child who had just left third level. I also deliberately selected some fathers who worked long hours; or who worked in male or female dominated organisations; or just male or female dominated departments within organisations. I also selected interviewees who had a time consuming non-work commitment such as part time education.

The participants were carefully chosen to ensure that the research covered fathers from broad occupational groups, with regard to:

- Sector (private and public)
- Type of industry
- Self Employed

In addition, I sought to get the viewpoint of at least one father who was unemployed in order to highlight an alternative opinion. Thus, the selection of one father who took voluntary redundancy and is now unemployed by choice, was strategically biased.

Consequently, the method used in selecting this non-random sample was a Judgemental Sample. The participants were all specifically chosen by me on the basis of their experience of fatherhood and employment/unemployment.



### **3.4 Justification of Choice of Methods**

This research was designed to be an exploratory study. Its strength lies in the depth rather than the breadth of data collected. Referring back to my theoretical framework you will have noticed how I did not restrict my framework of thinking to just one theory. Consequently, I used my findings to develop a hypothesis that can be tested in a subsequent study in the future. This was not one of my initial objectives, but nonetheless, such is my interest in this area that I may revisit my research findings in a few years time when I intend returning to do my Masters. By this time I am sure there will be even more published data available to analyse.

Having made the effort to schedule interviews I knew I was guaranteed to get information from my participants. Whether I got the kind of information I needed depended on things such as my demeanour and tone on the day of the interview. It was also crucial that I put the interviewees at ease from the start.

I believe using semi structured interviews was best suited to help me answer my research question because the views of my interviewees were highly subjective. I needed to vary my questions from interview to interview as well as possibly varying the order of questions depending on the flow of conversation (e.g. as was the case with Dermot who was unemployed and therefore I did not need to ask him about the pattern of his working week). This method afforded me the best opportunity to evaluate the extent to which my findings were going to be accurate and reliable and as a result I was in a better position to draw conclusions.

I decided that interviews were the most appropriate method to find out what participants thought or felt for example about leave from work in times of an emergency. They allowed me to explore their opinions and get a full range and depth of information.

For example, Martin said he had never taken parental leave, so I was able to probe him on that and get a feel for the key issues. As a result I was able to obtain rich subjective data that gave me a valuable insight into how fathers juggle their home and working lives. What is more, the appropriateness of this has been supported by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991).

I used an audio-recording because it provided me with the most comprehensive way of interpreting what was said during the interviews. It proved invaluable to have an accurate record of the interviews when it came to subsequent transcription. Although, I would add that the i-phone didn't pick up behavioural cues such as hesitated answers that I noticed - so my handwritten notes complimented the audio recording adequately.

My literature review was in effect an analysis of the secondary data. The use of secondary data not only saved time and resources but it also afforded me the opportunity to think about the theories and issues I encountered in the journals etc. As a result I could then spend more time analysing and interpreting the data.

### 3.5 Pilot

A key ingredient of my methodology was to run a pilot protocol. I was uncertain as to whether I would 'get away' with asking certain questions (e.g. who is the main wage earner?). I was also unsure whether my data collection method was appropriate to facilitate empirical research, so I needed to do a preliminary investigation.

I selected one individual who, demographically at least, was comparable to those who I interviewed in the final study. (He had one child, he once worked part time and full time as an employee, he was unemployed several times and he is now self employed). I then used this individual to identify problematic features with my questions.

It was incorrect of me to presume that just because I knew the interviewees, they would openly volunteer information. For example, one father who I contacted was going through a marriage breakdown and understandably he was not willing to participate. Of course I had no knowledge of this beforehand, but it was still a mistake to expect him to participate just because I knew him. The pilot test highlighted to me the importance not to educate my participants on my theoretical framework. Rather, I decided to tell them that the purpose of my topic was 'a detailed look at fathers' roles at work and at home'.

It became very clear early in my pilot testing that a set of generic questions was never going to elucidate the data I required. So it became apparent that a significant amount of probing would be necessary with some of the interviewees.

I also had an overlap with some of the questions (e.g. the benefit of asking an open question such as ‘tell me about a typical week’ revealed, with a little probing, data about time spent commuting to work, hours worked etc). I could therefore drop certain questions and refine others. For example, instead of asking ‘What changes have you made to the way you work, or to your job, since becoming a father? I decided to ask ‘Has being a father changed the way you think about work?’. I could then probe them fully on how they felt about those changes.

Using a pilot protocol also assisted in determining my theoretical framework. It highlighted to me the need to consider the writings of both traditional and contemporary theorists and it identified various roles in the literature such as the ‘breadwinner role’. The framework then made it possible for the data to be collected.

Another important result of the pilot was that it allowed to me consider alternative methodologies.

With my pilot protocol completed, my theoretical framework and methodology emerged and I then considered my full study ready to begin in earnest.

### **3.6 Consideration of Alternative Methodologies**

The interviews provided a great deal of personal contact. I did consider sending my participants a questionnaire, but the interaction from the human contact resulted in completely different responses to what I would have received had I sent a questionnaire via post or e-mail. Questionnaires are impersonal and they don’t tell the full story, the story was the most powerful depiction that could highlight what I was looking for.

I would even argue that the interviewees were energised by the opportunity to discuss the topic face to face rather than through a questionnaire. Moreover, with a questionnaire there was a greater risk of missing data, as I couldn't prompt or probe. Also, questionnaires are associated with low response rates.

I decided not to use a survey as these only ask for opinions without asking for reasons. Also, it is possible that I may have needed a sampling expert with a survey, so this methodology would not have answered my research question.

I gave serious consideration to using a focus group. However, on reflection, I felt it would be quite difficult to analyse responses. Also, I would have needed a good facilitator and it would have proved to be enormously difficult to schedule six people together.

### **3.7 Unit of Analysis**

The phenomenon under study, which I sought to collect and analyse data on, was work-life balance from a fathers' perspective and a detailed look at their roles at work and at home.

Once I had my unit of analysis defined I could then state the purpose of my research.

### **3.8 Demographic Profile**

The demographic profile below indicates differences within the samples chosen. It is important, therefore, both to acknowledge the heterogeneity of those selected and to give context to the responses. The principal identifiers for selection for interview have been listed in section 3.3 above.

**Table 3.1 Demographic profile of participants.**

	Employment Sector	Level of Education	Occupational Status	Age	No. of Dependent Children	Age Range of Children	Marital Status	Usual Working Hours
<b>Greg</b>	Civil Service	Degree	Manager	39	2	2-4	Married	35
<b>Simon</b>	Public Service	Masters Degree	Senior Manager	43	2	6-9	Married	48
<b>Martin</b>	Manufacturing	Leaving Certificate	Supervisor	37	3	1-9	Married	35
<b>Joe</b>	Financial Services	National Certificate	Clerical		1	1	Co-habiting	37.5
<b>Dermot</b>	N/A	National Certificate	Unemployed	38	3	3-7	Married	—
<b>Paul</b>	Information Technology	Masters Degree	Owner Manager	43	1	22	Separated	60

*(All pseudo names to protect identity)*

There was a major difference in the age profile of fathers with dependent children that I interviewed. The average age of five of the six fathers interviewed was 32 when they had their first child (For comparative purposes, in the UK, Matheson & Summerfield (2001) found the mean age of fathers at the birth of their first child was 30). Conversely, the sixth father was 21 when his only child was born. He is now aged 43. Therefore, fathers with children under 9 years of age accounted for 84% of the sample.

With the exception of Dermot, who was unemployed, all fathers worked full time.

### **3.9 Limitations of Research Design**

The qualitative research that I carried out was an interactive process. It allowed insights into attitudes, and reasons for these attitudes. Results therefore are not based on quantitative statistical evidence but on a small sample of a cross-section of working fathers. Hence, my findings are illustrative rather than statistically representative. Furthermore, recognising that fathers are a heterogeneous group, it is important to note that they will have differing views on the basis of their age and background etc.

A strong dimension of my research was that fathers were interviewed independently of their spouse/partners. The research did not take into account the views of any fathers working in the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) sector, nor did it involve interviews with any single fathers or fathers in same sex relationships - whose views may be relevant to the policy debate. Further research is needed to understand the views of these fathers. Notwithstanding this, the absence of such cohorts does not mean they are less important.

The greater challenge for me was to investigate the phenomenon pertinent to a mixed group of fathers, and as a result it is this coalesces that is represented in my research.

Similarly, while the research did include the views of fathers working in different sectors and whose children were of different ages, the numbers are too small to draw conclusions regarding any differences in attitude.

One of the problems associated with a phenomenological perspective is that of self-report biases. The views of the fathers I interviewed were highly subjective. Therefore, it is possible that some participants may have over exaggerated certain answers in fear that anything less may be perceived as a less socially acceptable belief or practice. This may, for example, have arisen in relation to the time spent with their children. However, there is no way to affirm this.

It should be noted that, with the exception of just one, all of the fathers interviewed lived with their children. Therefore this study is not representative of those fathers who no longer reside in the family home. According to literature, those children who benefit from increased time with their parents are 'parental time rich' Sayer *et al* (2004). Although, this viewpoint has been challenged by research emerging from the USA which claims that contact between children and their non-resident father is on the up: Amato and Sobolewski (2004).

I mentioned above that the sample I chose was a Judgemental one. Part of the reason for this was to include those fathers for whom the experience of taking leave (if any) was still relatively recent i.e. because the age of their most recent child was under 18 months old. On the other hand, I purposely excluded fathers whose new born was under three months old. This is because they may be undecided about the amount of leave to take (if any) or they may not even be aware of what options are available to them. Another important reason for excluding this group was because it can be a hectic and changeable period in their lives and a request from me to partake in an interview may have been viewed as an unwelcome intrusion.



Although not necessarily a limitation, I would like readers to know that it was difficult to narrow down my general interest in the topic of work-life balance in order to focus on a particular issue that was small enough to be investigated. I spent from late September 2009 to early January 2010 thinking about what approach to take. I even changed my mind lots of times regarding what title to give the research before finally deciding on an appropriate one.

I was aware that I might encounter sensitive issues and I did so with one interviewee in particular. Paul's daughter no longer lives with him. He is not a single father, as he is still married, but a family feud resulted in his daughter moving out of the family home. I think he was able to speak quite freely about it now, as it happened a few years ago, but I suspect this would not have been the case had it happened more recently. Nonetheless, I approached it cautiously. Using non threatening language, and by just nodding and acknowledging what he had said, I believe he opened up and he subsequently spoke at ease about it.

According to Collis and Hussey (2009), interviewers should be alert to interviewees who may be 'wearing two hats'. I came across an example of this with Paul, who is self employed and runs his own business. When asked what he thought about parental leave being unpaid he replied:

Well, if the Government are thinking of compensating those who want to take time off to be with their children I say to hell with them. Why should my taxes be used to supplement others to take parental leave? I'm not entitled to parental leave. If I want to take a half day to bring my daughter to the cinema or anything, I lose a half a days pay. So let that be the same for everyone else.

In spite of this, further questioning of Paul revealed the real reason he had such a strong opinion on this. He was only 21 when his daughter was born in 1988 and he received no assistance from the state in rearing his child. Depending on which ‘hat’ Paul was wearing I had to be weary of this when asking questions, as it could have been a limitation of my research. So, was Paul answering as a self employed businessman or as young man who, 22 years ago, had a daughter outside of marriage and got very little help from anyone? The answer is, he was most likely wearing both hats.

### **3.10 Summary of Methodology**

The paradigm which developed my framework of thinking and guided my research was interpretivism. In order to answer my research question I used in depth semi-structured interviews. Participants were carefully chosen to ensure that the research covered fathers from broad occupational groups.

I used a pilot test to identify problematic features with my questions. Consideration was also given to alternative methodologies such as a questionnaire, a survey and a focus group.

However, my original methodology of semi structured interviews proved to be the most advantageous when it came to drawing conclusions.

Finally, I demonstrated how my limitations ensured that my findings were illustrative rather than statistically representative.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

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In analysing my findings I must remind you of the diversity of the families under my study (see demographic profile in section 3.8).

You will recall from the identification of my paradigm in section 3.2 how I was not expected to be objective in my study. You will also note the reference I made to Geertz's (1975) theory for interpreting meanings, which he called 'thick description'.

During the interviews I was always striving to improve my understanding of work-life balance from a fathers' perspective. In attempting to do this I used my existing knowledge of the topic tried to attach meanings to the behaviours I was observing. By looking for these meanings I was employing 'thick descriptions'.

Geertz (1975) explains that his theory is a form of gathering and analysis at the same time. When you are making the description you are also doing the analysis. This is achieved by reflecting on what you have observed.

In this section that I am reporting my findings in order to make clear the phenomenon of work-life balance from a fathers' perspective. As I set out to analyse my findings I was reminded of my limitations. In particular, generalisations were not going to be possible. It was essential therefore that I get a better understanding of the phenomenon by getting rich data with 'thick descriptions'.

In this manner I completed my gathering and analysis.

## **4.1 Family Life**

It was important for me to find out about father's views on their role in the family as this was going to affect the way in which they balanced their work and private lives.

### **4.1.1 Spouse/Partners Role**

A very important part in determining how much time a father spent with his children was whether his spouse/partner worked. Where both parents work full time a lot depends on how flexible both jobs are. However, where the mother does not work she tends to look after the children full time. My research painted two clear pictures; the only mothers who cared for the children full time as a result of not being in work were spouse/partners of fathers who worked in the public sector.

Whilst the spouse/partners of the fathers who worked in the private sector were both working full time. When probed on this, the fathers who worked in the public sector said it was their spouse/partners choice not to return to work until the children started school. On the other hand, the fathers who worked in the private sector said their wife had no choice and had to return to work for economic reasons. Further probing revealed that the common denominator in both situations was financial, despite one father who worked in the public sector saying:

*'I think it is a mothers' natural duty to care for the children when they are young. We didn't want strangers rearing our children from a creche'.*

Simon

As my probing continued it became quite evident that the real reason his wife stayed at home to rear the children was nothing to do with 'a mother's natural duty'. It was purely down to the fact that as a family they could survive on one wage. Simon was the father who expressed the strongest views on fathers as breadwinners, and it seems he sees work as his main commitment. He is happy in the knowledge that the mother is taking care of his children.

Simon went on to add that:

*'It just doesn't make financial sense for my partner to work. I am the highest earner and if she returned to work her entire wages would be used up paying for crèche fees'.*

Simon

Simon's opinion is very important and analysing it may explain some of the dilemmas contemporary fathers face when trying to address their work life balance. This context presents, on the one hand, a father who thinks he has to work to make ends meet. On the other hand, the gender gap in pay, that is still prevalent, means some fathers would find it difficult to cut back their hours. Equally, this was the view of Paul who said he will be:

*'working all the hour's god sends him when the recession is over'.*

Paul

I was also very interested to find any evidence where the highest earner decided to stay at home by choice. Hence I probed this point. I found no evidence of this, which suggests financial matters remain a main consideration in deciding who stays at home with the children.

#### 4.1.2 Childcare Arrangements/Household Tasks

When asked what their current childcare arrangements were there was a notable divide. The spouse/partners of the two fathers who worked in the public sector took full care of their children. However, the spouse/partners of the fathers who worked in the private sector were working full time and the children were cared for by a mixture of grandparents and crèches.

This uncovers more evidence of a traditional division in labour if one works in the public sector as opposed to the private sector. As the spouse/partners of those fathers working in the public sector are more likely to be homemakers, whereas the spouse/partners of those working in the private sector are more likely to be part of a dual earner household.

**Table 4.1 Time spent with Children**

Time spent with Children	No. of Fathers	% of Fathers
During the week	1	17%
At week-ends	5	83%

My findings pointed out that most fathers spent more time with their children at the weekends. However, and rather interestingly, this conflicts with research by Fuligni & Brooks-Gunn (2001) who found that fathers spent more time with their children during the week when the mothers' earnings were greater.

Yet, I had only one example in my research where the father was not the main earner (i.e. Martin). Despite this, he revealed that he spent more time with the children at the weekends rather than during the week, thus challenging Fuligni & Brooks-Gunn's theory.

*'At the weekend the children associate me with the trips to the playground and playing football'.*

Greg

Also, and quite importantly, this finding highlighted a gap in my theoretical framework. Therefore, I read some more literature to find evidence of this finding from the fieldwork. I found evidence to validate my finding in Yeung *et al.* (2001). Admittedly though, this wasn't the only time this happened to me in my research so I must highlight it as a mistake.

Joe said he spent more time playing with the children than his wife did. Pleck (1997) confirms this as a traditional viewpoint. However, a more recent declaration in the literature shows a different side with Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson, (2004) declaring that fathers are now spending more time across a range of their children's activities, and not just at play time. Yeung, Sandberg, Davies-Kean, and Hofferth (2001) endorse this view adding that variations in the amount of time fathers spend playing with their children begin to emerge much later in children lives.

Quite interestingly, Dermot drew attention to the fact that he spent more time on household tasks since his youngest child was born. This finding contradicts some of the evidence from literature such as Kodz's (2003) analysis of the British Household Panel survey, which claims that it is still an area more associated with mothers than fathers.

However, it is worth noting that Dermot was the only participant who was unemployed. Therefore, as he admitted, he had more time on his hands to complete such tasks.

#### **4.1.3 Fatherhood**

Simon suggested that fathers should be involved with their children as early as possible. This view is supported in the literature by Flouri and Buchanan (2003) where they suggest that fathers who are involved with their children from an early age should guarantee that they remain involved throughout their childhood.

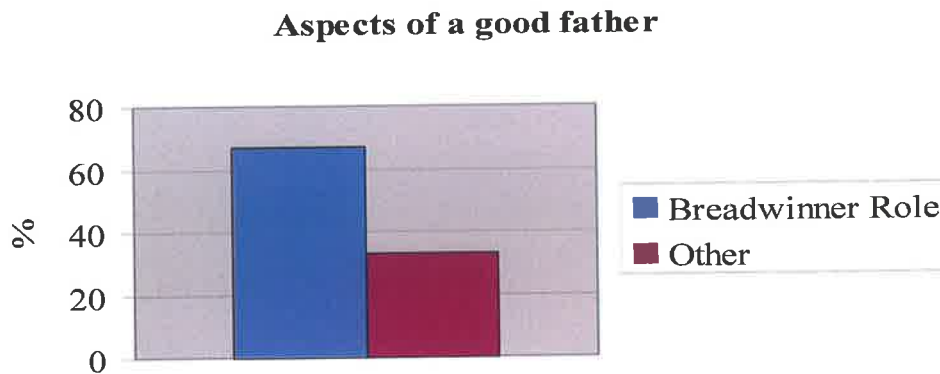
My research revealed the desired wish of some fathers to play an active role in their children's education. This strong aspiration has arisen, in certain cases, from a time when some fathers may have left school early (e.g. Martin). This link between fathers going out to earn, and their children doing well in school, is supported in research by Marsiglio, Amato, Day and Lamb (2000).

*'It means a lot to my partner and I for our children to learn about the importance of getting a good education and a good job. We had nothing growing up and some children these days are spoon fed and molly-coddled too much. We want our children to earn everything they get in life just like we had to'.*

Martin



Figure 4.1 Aspects of a good father



Fathers stressed the financial rewards and compulsion to work out of a sense of duty.

The evidence produced in my study confirmed that the breadwinner role remains as commanding as ever for working fathers, thus affirming that found in the literature e.g. Warin *et al.* (1999). It suggests that the provider role will perpetuate until we witness a new set of cultural conditions.

Although, all respondents noted a conflict for fathers providing for their family through working and childcare.

*'providing for my family is my raison d'etre'.*

Paul

*'I feel compelled to work full time and do all the overtime I can in order to fulfil my duty to the family'.*

Martin

Two fathers referred to their role as a traditional one. For instance as noted by Simon when he said:

*'I don't see what could be more important than providing a roof over their heads and keeping food on the table and clothes on their backs'.*

Simon

*'Providing for the family is by far the most important thing'.*

Greg

An alternative view to the breadwinner role was disclosed by Dermot, who is unemployed. He revealed how being out of work and unable to provide for his family had led to deep feelings of frustration and even failure at times.

He added that being out of work had severely shattered his confidence. Although fathers who were not working had the opportunity to adopt a more hands-on parenting role, and Dermot said this was the most positive gain since he lost his job (see below).

Other aspects of fatherhood mentioned as more important than breadwinning were playing with the children, spending time with the children, acting as a role model, teaching them right from wrong, listening, communicating and 'just being there'.

*'Reading my daughter a bedtime story is far more important to me than earning a wage'.*

Dermot

*'I would rather tell my manager that I cannot swap shifts than tell my son that I cannot go to see him playing hurling. They're only young once you know'.*

Martin

These comments suggest that the whole notion of working life for some fathers remains questionable. These views are sustained in the literature through the writings of (Connell, 1987; Collinson and Hearn, 2004).

It was rather contradictory that most fathers' felt being the main breadwinner was very significant. Yet every father interviewed felt both parents could hold down a career and raise a family. And, every father felt that both parents were equally capable of raising their children.

This suggests a type of interchangeable role between parents, which is a far cry from the traditional view of the fathers' role as the main breadwinner.

*'The most important thing to being a good dad for me is to provide for the family and act as a role model for the children'.*

Simon

*'I base a lot of what I do as a father as a result of seeing how my own dad reared us'.*

Dermot

*'Views about what it means to be a father, and the roles of fatherhood, are constructed over many years...boys become fathers to boys who will become fathers in the future'.*  
(Cabrera *et al.*, 2000:131).

When probed a little further on Dermot's comment he added:

*'Well, he was hardly ever there. He would go out to work early in the morning and come home late in the evening, get his dinner and then ask not to be disturbed whilst he read the paper. He never helped us with homework or tucked us in at bedtime. Maybe this explains why I am so hands on with my children today '.*

All fathers agreed that fathers and mothers could equally care for their children, but some specific duties were better suited to the mother.

*'My children always want their Mother when they are sick. I think mothers are naturally better and more suited to these kinds of things'.*

Martin

*'She has more patience than me and can multi task better, whereas I am more useful at the practical side of things like making the lunches or doing the chores around the house. But it works ok in our house anyway'*

Greg

These views may be best understood by seeing the roles of fathers and mothers as different but complimentary. But, as declared in my limitations, the fathers in this study were interviewed independently of their spouse/partners. Nevertheless Greg's view concurs with that of Barnett & Baruch (1987), who found that 'fathers with employed wives and...who hold less traditional attitudes...did proportionately more feminine home chores'. Although, this view is contradicted by Gatrell (2005) who argues that while men may desire equal roles in terms of parenting, they are less likely to want dual responsibility when it comes to housework and domestic labour.

Rather paradoxically it is worth noting the comments made by Dermot who has spent the last eighteen months at home with the children since he took voluntary redundancy:

*'Maybe I have been underestimating my self for years but I think I have developed all the skills that their mother has since being home all the time with the children. I'm definitely more tolerant and, dare I say it, more affectionate than I was before. I have learned a lot and probably now appreciate the role mothers played for years'.*

Dermot

This is certainly an interesting viewpoint and even though Dermot's' motivation for taking the voluntary redundancy was primarily financial, he still made the choice himself and he knew he would be a full time stay at home dad for a while at least. Therefore this finding upholds the argument made by Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004) referred to in section 2.7.1. It would be fascinating to know whether Dermot's view is shared by more fathers but as already mentioned, my research is too small to allow for generalisations.

However, it probably is fair to say that this view is indicative of the kind of dilemmas most contemporary fathers face when trying to balance their work and family lives.

Dermot's current situation was the only evidence I found of fathers who were prepared to give up work full time and become stay at home dads on a permanent basis. For a time at least Dermot may have been viewed as gender pioneer, challenging the hegemonic position, thus broadening alternative versions of the traditional roles played by both genders.

Every interviewee pointed out the importance of a stable relationship with their partner as vital to the upbringing of their children. This is affirmed in the literature also by Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) who note that high paternal involvement with their children is grounded in a sound relationship with their partner. Furthermore, Cummings, Goeke-Morey and Raymond (2004) suggest that this involvement with their children is more at risk where marital disputes are present.

Martin, whose wife also works full time, said both he and his wife believed that all aspects of the parenting of their children should be shared equally. But he expressed deep levels of frustration when this was not the case:

*'Both my wife and I can do overtime and get paid for it whenever it is available, but it always seems to be me that ends up doing it and then the wife is left to do everything else'.*

Martin

Maybe this dilemma can be interpreted in relation to Blair-Loy's (2003) theory 'double heretics' which highlights the challenges associated with reconciling care and career, termed 'the schema of family devotion' and the 'the schema of work devotion'.

Most fathers admitted that the mother generally took the lead when the children were young and especially with the firstborn.

*'I didn't have a clue what to do when our daughter was born; well none of us did really. But my wife has two nieces, and she also had a difficult pregnancy, so I think she was more clued in than me. I also think there is that maternal instinct thing where the mother just feels it is her natural duty to do the first feed etc'.*

Greg

Nevertheless, there was some evidence that suggested that the lead role is reversed when the children get older.

*'I definitely was more involved when she was a teenager. I brought her to her first concert etc. She was also very interested in my career and line of work so we had more things in common and I think we enjoyed our time together as she got older'.*

Paul

#### 4.1.4 Changes since becoming a Father

There were mixed reactions amongst those interviewed regarding their attitude since becoming a father.

*'Work is now just a means to an end for me. I just do my work and go home. I can switch off much easier as I don't want to be bringing my work problems home with me. I am not as career driven as I was before and I certainly don't feel guilty anymore about going home on time'.*

Greg

*'One thing is for sure, I won't be doing any extra favours or staying behind late in the evenings any more. I have lost trust in my organisation since the redundancy programme last year. I didn't like the way staff were treated and I used to regularly stay late and work through lunch hours but I have now realised there is more to life than work. I'm sure my epitaph will not say that I should have worked more hours. The recession has made me look at things differently'.*

Joe



In contrast

*'I'm more determined to do well for my children. I am their role model and I am certainly more committed which is why I went back to college in the evenings. I want to get promoted and get recognised and by working harder I am giving the company less reasons to make me redundant'*

Martin

This opinion may be understood in relation to Blair-Loy's (2003) theory of the 'work devotion schema' where work is inferred as a source of meaning and self-absorption with dedication shown to the employer and towards advancing one's career, whilst at the same time underlining the importance of the breadwinner role.

It is quite evident therefore that many fathers change their attitude to work after having children. This in turn can influence what they do in practice. Although as we seen above, (???) very few have made changes to the way they work in order to spend more time with the family since becoming a father. The one exception is Martin.

*'I went on nights for a few months when we had our third child. I could do the school runs and look after our two eldest when their mother was tending to the baby'.*

Martin

This example of 'atypical' employment was a deliberate move to be more involved, and is in contradiction with evidence found by La Valle, Arthur, Millward, Scott, with Clayden (2002) which found that 'atypical' working limited fathers time with their offspring's.

Whilst every father interviewed said they would like to spend more time with the family, I found very little evidence of fathers seeking to reduce their hours or even work part time (see section 4.2.3).

*'I suppose I could spend more time with the family but I would have to look for work closer to home and I just don't see it happening. I have to travel and live away from home in order to get the contracts and the business'.*

Paul

This suggests that fathers really do have a choice, but appear not to want to be more involved with the family. Could it be that work is seen as a 'get away'?

*'Well to be honest, I wouldn't like to be a stay at home dad all the time, I'd go mad'.*

Greg

Some fathers say they just find it so difficult to get the time

*'What I really need is an eight day in the week'.*

Martin

When probed further I asked if he spent much time with the family at the week-ends, to which the reply was:

*'As much as I can. But, because I work some Saturdays and I am shattered on Sunday, when I do have time I seem to always be catching up on things around the house'.*

Martin

Maybe this suggests that some fathers could make better use of their working time, although it is difficult to make generalisations.

Also, in order to rigorously analyse any adjustments in fathers working hours they would have to be viewed against the working hours of the mothers in question, as the literature clearly illustrates a gender divergence in relation to working time following childbirth, with a higher proportion of mothers decreasing their working time.

**Table 4.2 Increase or Decrease in working time after having Children**

Working Time	No. of Men	% of Men	No. of Women	% of Women	Total
Increased	17	22%	9	10%	26
Decreased	61	78%	81	90%	142
Total	78	100%	90	100%	168

Source: Drew et al. (2003). Off The Treadmill. National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies: Dublin.

## 4.2 Work Life

The findings, analysis and discussion in this section came after responses to the following questions:

### 4.2.1 Working Hours

My findings revealed that the person who worked the longest hours was Paul, who is self employed (see demographic profile in section 3.8). He said he is now separated from his wife and he added that the years of working long hours were a contributory factor to his separation. This factor is established in other studies also, for example, Crouter (2001).

Paul said he could have chosen a career that would involve working less hours and spending less time commuting but he specifically chose not to.

*'It was important for one of us to always be there, but I was the more ambitious and driven one. Therefore it was me who went to college and started my own business. I've been working since I was sixteen. I've worked very hard to make sure my family were never stuck for anything and had a lifestyle they could enjoy and not be always struggling. But this has come at a price. Unfortunately I wasn't always there to support when I should have been. My health and well being have also suffered over the years as a result of working ridiculously long hours. I missed out on some landmark events and I regret that'.*

Paul

The literature would support Paul's view with fathers who reported spending too much time at work left thinking that it was their partner who would suffer due to imbalance in shared caring and household duties (Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly and Robinson, 2002).

Paul also typifies the traditional hegemonic stance regarding working life with continuous full time work (Ellingsaeter, 1995).

The strongest variable I could find in relation to working hours was the correlation between occupational category and level of education. This confirmed that the longest hours were worked by those in senior positions with the highest education level (Simon and Paul). This compares to unskilled manual workers who worked less hours and were not as well educated (Martin).

It was clear from the interviews that those fathers working reported no issues when it came to requesting time off for emergency family matters or indeed for other important occasions.

*'It's always been a case with my boss that if you scratch my back then I'll scratch yours and I've no problems with that. In fact I appreciate it and I think my employer gets it back in spades from me when it comes to month end etc'.*

Joe

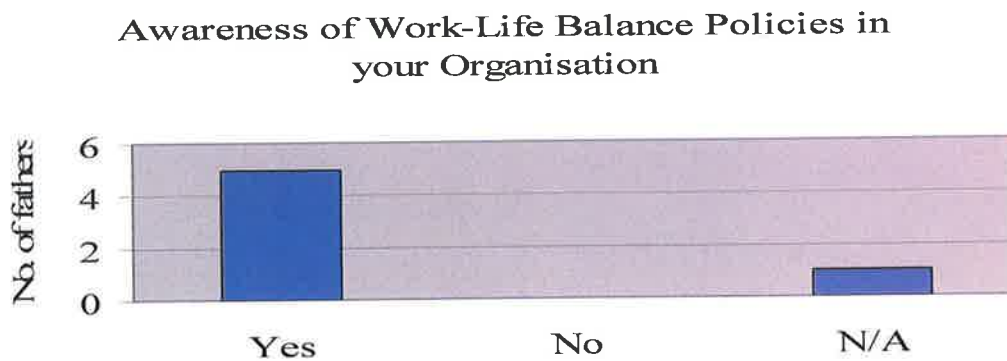
Overall there was a degree of compromise amongst fathers over what they expect from their employers when it comes to time off for emergency family matters/other important occasions.

The culture of the organisation was stressed as an important factor when it came to striking the balance between work and family life.

It is interesting to analyse Joe and Simon's comments above in comparison to evidence from the literature which in some cases acted rather counter-intuitively to my finding. For example, Andersen, Appleldorn, and Wise (1996), found that male managers were less supportive than female managers when it came to taking parental leave. Further, Rost (1999) noted that in Germany it was implied that fathers using parental leave was an overt way of being idle. What is more, Fleetwood (2007) has even suggested that in a market-led economy, employers will twist flexible policies to suit themselves. As a result, the only ones who suffer are those whom the policies were targeted at in the first instance.

## 4.2.2 Workplace Policies

**Figure 4.2 Awareness of Work-Life Balance Policies**



It was clear that overall awareness of family-friendly arrangements was high, with the culture of the organisation an important factor in this regard.

Interviewees were asked to select, from a list of flexible working arrangements, those options that were available to them and which ones they had availed of.

Paul was not asked these questions as most of the options are non applicable for self employed persons.

Also, Dermot is unemployed therefore there was nothing to be gained by asking him either.

**Table 4.3 Availability and Take up Rates of Work-Life Balance Policies**

Arrangement	Available		Take up	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Job Share	75%	25%	0%	100%
Part time	75%	25%	0%	100%
Flexitime	25%	75%	0%	100%
Term-time	50%	50%	0%	100%
Home working	25%	75%	0%	100%
Time off in lieu	100%	0%	100%	0%
Annualised hours	0%	100%	0%	100%
Paternity leave	75%	25%	75%	25%
Informal flexibility	100%	0%	100%	0%
Compressed hours	0%	100%	0%	100%
Employee counselling	75%	25%	0%	100%
Career breaks	100%	0%	0%	100%
Education schemes	100%	0%	50%	50%
On/off site medical facilities	100%	0%	75%	25%
Membership discounts/gym etc	100%	0%	50%	50%
On-site crèche	0%	100%	0%	100%
Subsidised crèche	0%	100%	0%	100%
Financial advisors	50%	50%	50%	50%



The highest take up rates were time off in lieu and informal flexibility thus validating Simon and Joes comments in section 4.2.1.

*'In fairness I can't complain about the type and range of work-life balance policies that are available to us'.*

Greg, works in the civil service.

*'The public service is renowned for its family-friendly policies and I've no major issue with any of them'.*

Simon, works in the public service.

It is interesting here to highlight findings made by Den Dulk (1999) where he suggested that large public sector organisations are more susceptible to media intrusion and therefore they tend to offer more work-life balance initiatives to their employees'

No father had ever taken a career break despite a very strong desire to do so by one father.

*'I am itching to go back and do my masters but I just couldn't do it with my current circumstances as the children are very young and time consuming. It isn't even a case of the money as we would just cut back for the 18 months but my main fear is that I would be replaced and end up doing another job when I return. And that would break my heart, as I have worked so hard to get to the position I am in today and I love my current job'.*

Greg, works in the civil service.

This endorses the findings in Humphreys, Drew and Murphy (1999) within the Irish Civil Service where, despite the availability of generous leave policies, the culture was one of disapproval by managers and colleagues alike.

Working from home was deemed not to be popular and was only available in one case. This option largely depended on the type of job that a father worked at. Although not directly asked this question, Paul commented on working from home during his interview. He added that it was clearly a case of doing it from time to time in order to concentrate on meeting a deadline and to avoid the distractions of the office environment.

*'I do it at month end when I have to do the books as I find it much easier to concentrate. All the paperwork is filed at home anyway, so I can create a mess around the home office for a few days knowing I don't need to clear the desk every evening'.*

Paul

What is clear from this is that it was done for work related reasons rather than to balance work with childcare commitments.

The preferred option for all those interviewed was to have informal arrangements in place with their immediate supervisor/manager, and there was no evidence to challenge this desire.

For some the option of compressed hours would be very welcome, although it was uncovered that this was heavily dependent on the type of job.

The demand for flexible arrangements was more likely to come from employees as opposed to those who are self employed.

One major difference to the stance a company takes on work-life balance is to look at the management and see if there are any senior figures who champion the ethos of family friendliness.

*'The women paved the way in our office. Lots of the female managers who have children take parental leave either a day a week or weeks off at a time in the summer. We now have fathers doing similar. Albeit these are recent dads whose children are young, but I know a few who take a half day parental every week now. That was unheard of a few years ago'.*

Joe

A very interesting point was made by Joe:

*'Even though our place has policies in place to support working parents, you would wonder what kind of signal is being sent out when they reduce paternity leave from five to three days and when a decision is made to stop 'topping up' salaries of those on maternity leave'.*

Joe

Joe said he would like to see more help coming from the government. By contrast, Martin said he would like to see more help coming from his employer.

Joe said:

*'I do feel my employer has made a concerted effort to ensure work-life balance initiatives are available to all employee's, but I still find there is ongoing tension between the time I spend in work and the time I devote to family matters'.*

#### **4.2.3 Parental Leave**

An important arrangement which is aimed at helping parents negotiate the care and career dilemma is parental leave. All fathers felt parental leave was recognition of the fact that parents have non-work commitments, with all but one adding that it should be paid.

Joe, who works in financial services in the private sector, said he was hesitant to avail of parental leave. He revealed that this was due to a genuine fear of jeopardising his career.

This was in marked contrast to Greg who works in the public sector. Greg said he shared the same concerns as Joe at first, but once he had spoken to other men who had recently become fathers for the first time he discovered that he was treated very well by his superiors and fellow workers. He also added that he was less stressed as a result of taking one day per week as parental leave and now he feels he has the balance right between his work and family life. (Greg had commenced this three weeks before the interview)

Although, Brandth and Kvande (2001) have noted the huge disparities between countries regarding whether these negotiations take place between the parents and employers, or whether the state gets involved to provide support.

Perhaps, rather controversially, the only father who felt parental leave should not be paid was Paul:

*'Why should my taxes subsidise others to have children. People should stand by their own actions and not expect any handouts from the state. There was no such thing as parental leave when our daughter was born'.*

Paul

He added that:

*'Even if it was paid at the same rate as welfare I don't know if many men in senior roles in particular would avail of it. I mean, you still lose out financially and you could even damage your career. I suppose it depends a lot on the culture in the workplace'.*

Paul

These sentiments are explicitly found in research (Crompton and Birkelund, 2000; Glass, 2004; Halrynjo, 2004, and Hochschild, 2001). Incidentally, in January 2006, the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP) announced a new paternity leave programme that included coverage for the self employed and comprised of a 5 week, individual, non-transferable leave package made up of 70% of previous earnings. It would be interesting to hear Paul's opinion on that, but unfortunately I only discovered this after the interview.

#### 4.2.4 Paternity Leave

Paternity leave was available to those working in the private and public sector. For those working in the public sector it was full pay for 3 days, this was also the case for one of those working in the private sector but for the other it was not available.

When asked of their experiences on returning from paternity leave the comments were quite diverse with some noting positive and other noting negative experiences.

Quite interestingly, Joe took three days paid paternity leave and two weeks annual leave immediately following the birth of his first child. When probed as to the whether this was the norm in his workplace he commented:

*'No, not really, but it didn't bother me. I saw my role as supportive in nature and my wife wanted to breastfeed so I felt it my duty to be there to support her. I could not have provided the level of support I did if I had returned to work so soon after the birth'.*

Joe

Joe's desire to support his wife whilst she was breastfeeding is validated by Earle (2000). Earle has suggested that when fathers are knowledgeable regarding the benefits of breastfeeding this can give confidence to the mother.

What is more, Joe said that if he could have afforded it he would have taken parental leave straight after his annual leave. But his wife's employer did not 'top up' her wages when on maternity leave so they were working off a much tighter budget.

The literature provides an interesting alternative view regarding this position. In Sweden, fathers are entitled to paid parental leave beyond the child's first year in addition to the 'daddy month provision'. Haas and Hwang (1999) have found that parental leave in Sweden is shared by 50% of parents up to the child reaching 30 months. Furthermore, according to Rostgaard (2003), the most common time for fathers to use their parental leave is when the child is aged 11 to 15 months.

Even though there was unanimous support for paternity leave to be made mandatory (see Figure x, appendix A) the attitudes of Simon and Joe were quite contrasting.

*'I was just too busy in work at the time to take any time off. I was recently promoted to a senior role and I thought it would not look good to my boss and fellow workers if I was gone out of the office for two weeks'*

Simon

*'I was made redundant three weeks before the birth of our son although I got a new job three months after he was born. Even though financially we are just about surviving, the time out of work was a real blessing in disguise, as I was able to take some of the pressure off my wife in the tough first few months and I was able to start bonding with him immediately. I would advise any father to take the maximum paternity leave available if it is offered'*

Joe

This was in marked contrast to what Paul said when he referred to ‘working all the hours god sends’ as soon as work started to flow his way again. Paul is self employed and his partner does not work. He added that it was customary for him to work 12 to 14 hour days when times were good. And, he could see himself at least matching this when the recession ended in order to bail himself and his family out of the debt they owe which has accumulated since the work dried up. This clearly has an impact on Pauls’ work-life balance, but to him there is no dilemma:

*‘providing for my family is my raison d’etre. If that means I only get to spend quality time with my daughter at the weekends then so be it. Taking time off to spend with the wife and child during the summer months is not even on my agenda at present.*

Paul

Paul’s situation might illustrate Hochschild (2001) theory, referred to as ‘emotional asceticism’, which is achieved by reducing the amount of care a child actually needs. Then again, according to Moss and O’Brien (2006), positive results are to be seen even if the paid leave is for a short period as the foundation has then been laid for longer term involvement.



### 4.3 Summary of Findings, Analysis and Discussion

This analysis explored father's attitudes towards their role within the family, how involved they are and what changes they would like to see in their family life and at work. I analysed fathers' demographic profile against their work practices and preferences.

These findings have advanced my understanding of the dilemmas fathers face in trying to balance their work and family lives.

- Financial matters remain a main consideration in deciding who stays at home with the children.
- Regarding childcare, further evidence was found to add to the assertion that mothers are more suited to certain tasks than fathers.
- Other aspects of fatherhood mentioned as more important than breadwinning were playing with the children, spending time with the children, acting as a role model, teaching them right from wrong, listening, communicating and 'just being there'.
- Positive development signs such as commitment towards employers in one instance and increasing time spent on household tasks in another.

- Workplace culture can have a negative impact on the take-up rates of work-life balance policies amongst fathers.
  
- Only a very small minority of fathers have made major changes to their working hours since becoming a father.
  
- Informal flexibility and time off in lieu were clearly the most popular ways of creating a better balance between the conflicting priorities of work and family life.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

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This final chapter synthesises the key findings from the previous chapters by setting out the major issues and challenges. It concludes with a proposal to test a hypothesis in a future study.

It is important to note the nature of this research was exploratory and the empirical fieldwork was limited in scope. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the limitations referred to in section 3.9, it is clear that a number of conclusions can be drawn from my research.

There is no doubt that being a provider remains at the heart of a fathers' moral fibre. Some of the comments made reflect the strong allegiance to the gender role creed of the male 'breadwinner'. However, other aspects of fatherhood were also emphasised as important, such as playing with the children and acting as a role model. Equally though it is clear, that some fathers still find there is ongoing tension between the time they spend in work and the time they devote to their families.

This research revealed a number of positive aspects also, such as fathers acquiring skills that have traditionally been associated with mothers. Despite this, the empirical findings arising from this study add further evidence to the assertion that mothers are more suited to certain tasks.

By taking care of children, fathers stand to gain skills which in turn can be transferred to the workplace. *'I'm definitely more tolerant'* commented one father, who has just spent the last eighteen months at home with the children since he took voluntary redundancy.

There was also evidence that many fathers changed their attitude to work after having children. Although, all respondents noted a conflict between providing for their family through working and childcare. Some of these conflicts, such as a long working hours culture, manifested itself in a marriage separation in once incident. While responsibility for managing time and wellbeing lies principally with the individual, managers and leaders still have an important role to play in their employees' time management.

It seems many fathers could be described as 'weekend fathers' – that is, they spend most of their time with the children on Saturdays and Sundays. For one father in particular this was a deliberate move, as his time outside of work during the week was devoted to furthering his career through part time education.

In addition, the variation in some of my findings could be translated into positive development signs such as commitment towards employers in one instance and increasing time spent on household tasks in another.

Only a very small minority of fathers have made major changes to their working hours since becoming a father. In contrast I provided strong evidence from Drew et al. (2003) that mothers significantly reduced their working hours since giving birth to their children.

Therefore, despite many fathers changing their attitude to work since having children, '*Work is now just a means to an end for me*' and '*I wont be doing any extra favours or staying behind late in the evenings any more*', there is very little evidence of practical change.

I made explicit reference (in the UK) to how things have changed for the better with regard to the extended/increased rights now afforded to fathers. But one thing the law doesn't guarantee is how the employee who avails of these initiatives will be viewed in the organisation, and this is a genuine concern for some fathers as noted during the interviews.

Deeming work-life balance important does not mean that career progression is unimportant. I pointed to one instance from the Civil Service where workplace culture can have a negative effect on a fathers desire to progress his career through education. The benefits of promoting a work-life balance culture must be supported from top management. They must set an example so that other fathers feel comfortable using them. They must consider how to counteract any fears their employees have about taking career breaks or going on parental leave for example. The other alternative is to go the compulsory route as referred to earlier regarding the approach taken in Norway.

On the other hand, some commented on how flexible their bosses were, and in fact one of the most utilised work-life balance policies was informal flexibility. I would argue, that just because fathers do not avail of parental leave etc does not mean they do not have a work-life balance.

For some, informal flexibility and time off in lieu are clearly the most popular ways of creating a better balance between the conflicting priorities of work and family life.

There is no doubt that when high profile fathers such as Barack Obama and Tony Blair go public on their paternal commitment that this has an impact across society, and from a social point of view one must applaud them. But, from a business viewpoint it is seen as another challenge entirely. However, as I have noted, organisations who do implement, and more importantly evaluate the take up of work-life balance programmes amongst their male employees who are fathers; experience higher loyalty, along with lower levels of absenteeism and increased productivity. My research suggested how advances in technology have allowed employers to offer a wider range of flexible options. Although, take up of options such as working from home proved to be highly dependent on ones job, and for others it just wasn't an option.

Helping fathers to achieve their goals is vital for society; they play a crucial role in the development of their children. My research revealed how some fathers were keen for their children *'to learn about the importance of getting a good education and a good job'*.

The intention behind schemes and policies to promote and encourage fathers to avail of more work-life balance initiatives was discussed here. And with these intentions in mind, I provided a comparative analysis at some other countries work-life balance programmes.

My research has shown for the most part, that the fairly traditional gender roles in families will continue. Most of the fathers interviewed earn more than their partners so it makes financial sense for them to continue to work and none of them expressed any desire to give up work or even reduce their hours significantly.

### **5.1 Research Questions Answered?**

I highlighted above several reasons why there is such a poor take up of work-life balance initiatives amongst fathers. I would now like to summarise these as follows:

- Financial concerns.
- Negative career consequences.
- Options not available.
- Job does not lend itself to flexible practices.
- Workplace culture.

For those responsible for implementing policy it is about planning, managing and developing opportunities to support fathers with the dilemmas they face.

My findings showed that the desire for fathers to spend more time with their children is palpable. But, with the recession holding an iron grip on some families it is not unreasonable to expect some fathers '*to work all the hours god sends*' just to make ends meet. This is especially true if there is only one income. I think this proves that there continues to be a dilemma.

Do fathers actively take a certain stance or do they adapt as circumstances dictate? The data in this research confirms that they consciously do both. They do this by being actively involved in the upbringing of their children. But, they have to adapt to the current pressures forced upon them due to the recession, such as not being able to afford to take parental leave.

My research has demonstrated that work-life balance is not just an issue for 'mothers of young children'. It is quite clear some countries, in particular in Scandinavia have championed the role of fathers for decades now. This study has highlighted that at the heart of contemporary fatherhood is a seismic shift in fathers being more involved in the, once considered solely maternal duties. Some fathers are already embellishing this role by reading bedtime stories, doing the school runs and spending more time on household chores.

Therefore, a more gendered focused approach by targeting specific measures at fathers e.g. paid paternity leave, would move the whole debate on significantly. It is my firm belief that this would serve to break down gender stereotypes, thus promoting gender equality.



## 5.2 Further Research

Further research is needed in a lot of areas on how fathers negotiate work-life balance. It could include exploring the relationship between workplace productivity and the take up of work-life balance programmes. It could entail the monitoring and evaluation of programmes aimed at fathers, the health and well being of fathers who continue to work long hours and father's experience of the use of paternity and parental leave.

Whether fathers adapt remains to be seen. Although, as highlighted in the literature, a number of authors have already challenged this, citing the resistance of domestic practices to change.

In terms of ongoing employment and social change I think I have found some positive developments noteworthy of further exploration. But, if this is to occur then there is no doubt that the norms associated with the traditional male breadwinner role will need to change also. One way of doing this would be to increase the length of paternity leave to match maternity leave. This would send a clear message that mothers are no longer seen as the primary caregivers and fathers are no longer seen as the primary earners. However, such a conceptual shift from the traditional male breadwinner role seems a long way away. If the equalisation of caring roles of both mothers and fathers was addressed, it would achieve more far-reaching results. I demonstrated evidence of this in Denmark.

### **5.3 Policy implications**

This research has policy implications if we are to address the current imbalance in the take up of work-life balance programmes amongst fathers. Priority needs to be given to paid paternity and paid parental leave in particular and we need to see more state support for childcare and a narrowing in the gender pay gap.

As my research has indicated, fathers are not a homogeneous group, therefore policy makers and employer's need to account for this. The policies required from fathers depends on their level of responsibility for their children and for many it appears that informal arrangements with their immediate supervisor/manager are sufficient to meet their needs.

A failure to assist fathers achieve the right balance between their work and personal lives has implications for both labour supply and family decisions so the kind and range of policies at national and local enterprise level will help determine labour market outcomes and the formation of families in the future.

It is quite clear, that assumptions that work-life balance is only for mothers of young children can lead to employment discrimination against the recruitment and promotion of women. This belief can also damage workplace culture thus making it difficult for men to change the gender stereotype associated with for example, the take up of parental leave.

My work on this topic has illuminated the reasons for the poor take up of work-life balance policies amongst fathers. I have highlighted how society benefits from helping fathers to achieve their goals. I have shown how being a provider remains at the heart of a fathers' moral fibre. However, moving the debate beyond this to the relevance of their roles in family life is an even more important policy recommendation.

#### **5.4 A Hypothesis to test**

Whether a father has availed of work-life balance policies or not, the contemporary view is that he should be flexible enough to provide for the family, contribute to household chores and spend more time with his children.

With unemployment in Ireland standing at 13.4% as at June 2010, 65.5% of which are men, (Central Statistics Office) it would be very interesting to see a future time-use survey done to measure precisely whether the amount of time fathers spent at caring and household duties actually increased as a result of being at home more due to unemployment, compared to that of mothers who remained in full time employment. This is the hypothesis I would like to test. I have no doubt that it will lead to yet more dilemmas with the work-life balance paradigm amongst fathers.

## CHAPTER 6 APPENDICES

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### APPENDIX 1

#### Qualitative Interview Questions

##### 1. Introduction

Thank participant in advance.

##### **The purpose:**

A detailed look at fathers' roles at work and at home.

##### **Anonymity & Confidentiality:**

Neither your name or the name of your organisation where applicable will be associated with your responses. Your contact details and all data you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and your anonymity is assured.

Ask permission to record on i-phone.

##### **Notes for interviewer:**

- To find out what interviewee's do, think or feel.
- Explore understanding, opinion, attitude and feelings.
- Open ended questions and prompt and probe where necessary (keep to minimum)
- A process of open discovery.
- Ask less intrusive questions first.

- Mix positive and negative questions to keep them thinking of their answers.
- Tell me your story in your own words.

## **2. Family life**

- Tell me about yourself and family. PROBE FOR NUMBER & AGE OF CHILDREN.

*I've been working in manufacturing for 15 years. It was my first job when I finished school. 3 boys aged 1, 3 and 9. Being married for 4 years but we are living together 10 years.*

- What is a typical week like?

*Both my wife and I work full time so it's hectic in our house during the week. Typical day starts 6.45am for me, I get up and get breakfast and get lunch boxes ready and then the wife takes over from 7.45am as I have to be in work for 8am. I collect the children after work 2 days a week whilst my wife goes home and cooks the dinner, we reverse this for the other 3 days. After dinner its play time with the children for 1-2 hours before bath and bed. I am doing a part time degree so I'm out of the house 2 evenings per week and then I usually study on the other nights when the lads are gone to bed.*

### **Spouse/partner**

- Does your spouse/partner work? *Yes*
- PROBE IF YES: e.g. full/part time etc  
*Credit Control, 35hr week, 5 days per week.*
- IF NOT WORKING: Was she working before having children? When did she stop working? Is she thinking of returning to work?

- PROBE FOR HIGHEST EARNER(could be a predictor of greater father involvement)

*My wife earns more than me.*

### **Fatherhood**

- How would you describe your level of involvement in looking after your children?

PROBE BUT DO NOT PROMPT.

*I am heavily involved and would describe my role as very hands on and practical.*

- What aspects do you think are important to being a good father? PROBE FOR SPECIFIC TASKS (SIGNIFICANCE)

*Its important to have patience, be a good listener, to show love to the children and have a bit of fun with them, messing and fooling around that kind of thing.*

- How important to being a good father is going out to work and being a breadwinner? (SIGNIFICANCE)

*Very important*

- What aspects of being a father are more/less important than this?(RELEVANCE)

*Being involved. Going to watch them play matches and help them as much as possible with their early education. We decided as soon as we had children that giving them the best education was going to be a vital part of their upbringing. This is because we both left school with just our leaving cert, none of us went to college which is why it is proving to be tougher now going back studying after nearly 18 years.*

- Do you think that, naturally, mothers and fathers are equally capable at caring for children? PROBE FULLY(BIAS)

*Yes*

- Are there any specific tasks (to do with parenting) that are suited to a particular sex? e.g. communicating

*Other than breastfeeding I can't think of anything else. Ask me again when they are all teenagers!*

- And do you think mothers and fathers are equally capable of working or having a career? IF NO: Why not?

*Yes*

### **Childcare Arrangements**

- Tell me about your current childcare arrangements? PROBE FOR FORMAL AND INFORMAL ARRANGEMENTS (E.G. GRANDPARENTS)

*The youngest fella is in crèche 3 days per week and with his nanny the other two days. The middle fella does Montessori 3 mornings per week and goes his nanny's after that. Our eldest fella is in primary school and he goes to his nanny's every day after school.*

- IF BOTH WORKING: Who takes time off work if the children are sick? Why?

*We both do but I admit it is more often my wife. The children always want their mam when they are sick, I think mothers are naturally better and more suited to these kind of things.*

- Who is usually with the children in the evenings and at weekends?

*See above re typical week. On Saturdays both my wife and I can do overtime and get paid for it whenever it is available, but it always seems to be me that ends up doing it and then the wife is left to do everything else. If im not working I usually bring the other two with me when my eldest lad is playing hurling whilst the wife does some housework and goes to do the grocery shopping. Sometimes we go out for lunch on Saturdays but we usually reserve Sundays for family trips away to the beach etc if it's fine.*

- And who does what at home in terms of the running of the home and family? PROBE FOR SPECIFIC TASKS: e.g. household chores (incl. garden), family finances etc

*We try split everything but it doesn't always work out that way. I do all the DIY stuff and a fair bit of the cooking but I do very little laundry I must say.*



### 3. Work Life

- Job title and type of work. *Warehouse Operative, Manufacturing*
- Do you manage people? (PROBE: Project manager/Line manager) How many?*No*
- How long have you been working there? (PROBE for link between when they joined the company and ages of children) *18 yrs but it's my second term there as I went to Australia for a year in 2000.*
- Why this choice of career? *No particular reason, it was my first job when I left school and we were probably still in recession from the 1980's.*
- Actual hours worked, and pattern of working week (PROBE FOR: days per week; location; regular/flexible; length of commute/travel time, time paid for, rewarded for working extra hours?)*39 hours. 5 days per week. Commute time is only 20 minutes return journey daily. I get paid overtime rates for working beyond finish times.*
- How easy or difficult is it for you to take time off or change your working pattern to accommodate out-of-work needs?
  - PROBE FOR EXAMPLES OF WHEN THEY HAVE DONE THIS, AND HOW OFTEN (**CLARITY & DEPTH**)

*'there was no hassle getting time off to be there for my sons first day at school and there have been other occasions like that over the years and my boss is very flexible that way as long as I make up the time lost'*

## Workplace policies

- Are you aware of any specific policies in your workplace to help parents meet their commitments? SEE CHECKLIST.PROBE FOR EXAMPLES (CLARITY)

*'Yeah im familiar with them all at this stage having had three children but I only heard of force majeure a few years ago. In fairness the HR Manager promotes flexible working etc but the difficulty can be in the implementation from the line managers etc. As I said earlier, my boss is very flexible but there are others who are not and I've heard some horror stories about some managers and how they treat their staff who are looking to leave early some days etc.*

- IF NO: Do you think this is this because the organisation doesn't have policies to help parents? Or because you have never asked about them?

*See above. I'm definitely going to ask about compressed hours though as I think that would save us a lot of money from not having to fork out every week for the crèche.*

- IF YES: Are these policies aimed at women, men or both?Why?(BIAS)

*Both, sure you'd never get away with just letting women take parental leave would you? because of discrimination and all that.*

- Which policies have you personally made use of, if any? (CAN INCLUDE PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT) SEE CHECKLIST. (COMPARISON)
  - What do you think of them?
  - IF NONE: Would you have liked to? Why/Why not?(BIAS)

*I've used some of them but if I could afford it I would love a career break to be honest. I think it's great to have employee counselling as I know some staff who have used it. I have also made use of the education scheme recently as I'm doing a degree part time.*

#### **4. Changes in your life since becoming a father**

- Has being a father changed the way you think about work? PROBE FULLY
 

*I'm more determined to do well for my children. I am their role model and I am certainly more committed which is why I went back to college in the evenings. I want to get promoted and get recognised and by working harder I am giving the company less reasons to make me redundant*
- What changes have you made to the way you work, or to your job, since becoming a father?
 

*I went on nights for a few months when we had our third child. I could do the school runs and look after our two eldest when their mother was tending to the baby. I felt it had to be done to be honest. My wife had a caesarean and she couldn't even get in and out of the shower without assistance.*

- What are the main changes you have made to your home life or social life?

*I might go out once a month to watch a match but that's about it really. Our social life revolves around the kids really, doing stuff at the weekends whenever we can.*

- How easy or difficult is it to meet both your work responsibilities and your other commitments as a father?

*I think I'm doing ok but I've just no free time anymore. It's tough financially and it will probably get tougher when they reach teenage years.*

- Can you think of any specific examples of situations when you have felt that:

**(CLARITY)**

- Work demands have interfered with non work commitments?

*On occasions I've had to work on Saturdays and I missed some of my sons hurling matches.*

- Your role as a father has suffered, or benefited, because of work commitments?

*I think I benefit from having an understanding boss but I've missed some of my sons hurling matches because I had to do overtime.*

**5. How easy/difficult is it for you to achieve a work life balance?**

- Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the amount of involvement you have in your family life? Why? PROBE FOR VERY/FAIRLY

*I'm fairly satisfied*

- Would you like to be more involved in your family life, or not really? Why?

*Of course I'd like to be more involved especially when they're so young.*

- IF YES, ASK: What prevents you from being more involved, if anything?

*Because I work some Saturdays and I am shattered on Sunday, when I do have time I seem to always be catching up on things around the house'.*

- What could help you to become more involved? PROBE FULLY:

*'What I really need is an eight day in the week'.*

- Would you like to see changes within the company/organisation in order to help fathers to meet their family commitments as well as their work commitments? Why/Why not

*Well I'd love to see paid paternity leave come in. and, I'd love to see some of management team utilise parental leave etc. I think it would send a good message to other employees especially fathers.*

### **Parental leave**

- How do you feel about this policy?

*The intention is good but I'd love to see Ireland take the same approach as they do in Scandinavia.*

- Do you think fathers would make use of parental leave? Why?/Why not?(BIAS)

*I would like to think yes but I suspect some are too traditional and old fashioned in that regard.*

### Paternity leave

- How do you feel about this policy?

*We don't have it in our company but I'd like to see it introduced and paid at the same rate as maternity leave is.*

- Do you think fathers would make use of paternity leave? Why?/Why not?

*Probably not for the same reasons as above.*

### Other ideas

- What else could be done to help fathers who work to become more involved in family life (if anything)?

*I think most modern men are fairly hands on but making paternity leave compulsory would be good. I'd also consider doing compressed hours if it was offered.*

### 6. Conclusion

- Does your organisation hold a work life balance day? No
- Has your opinion on work-life balance changed in anyway since the recession? (BIAS)

*To be honest I want to work hard and be a role model for my kids. I want them to look up to me. But there is so much pressure on families now. We are lucky because we still have two incomes, if one of us lost our jobs in the morning it would be very difficult but I know we'd survive. Working and having an income is important but it is more important to be there for your kids whether you've money in your pocket or not.*

Thank You.

## Checklist

<b>Arrangement</b>	<b>Available</b>	<b>Take up</b>
Job Share	Yes/No	Yes/No
Part time	Yes/No	Yes/No
Flexitime	Yes/No	Yes/No
Term-time	Yes/No	Yes/No
Home working	Yes/No	Yes/No
Time off in lieu	Yes/No	Yes/No
Annualised hours	Yes/No	Yes/No
Paternity leave	Yes/No	Yes/No
Informal flexibility	Yes/No	Yes/No
Compressed hours	Yes/No	Yes/No
Employee counselling	Yes/No	Yes/No
Career breaks	Yes/No	Yes/No
Education schemes	Yes/No	Yes/No
On/off site medical facilities	Yes/No	Yes/No
Membership discounts/gym etc	Yes/No	Yes/No
On-site crèche	Yes/No	Yes/No
Subsidised crèche	Yes/No	Yes/No
Financial advisors	Yes/No	Yes/No

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