



An exploration of the extent to which remote working has contributed to the “Maternal Wall” at leadership level in an organisation in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland.

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## *Abstract*

This research presents the results from an exploratory study which aimed to investigate the extent to which remote working has contributed to the ‘Maternal Wall’ at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry, since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland. A growing concern amongst researchers, alongside a prominent gap in literature provided the rationale for the exploration of this topic. This study was designed to gain a greater understanding of how maternal biases, or the “Maternal Wall” inhibits women from climbing the corporate ladder to achieve their full potential. To do this, the researcher examined the current relevant literature which contextualised the impact that gender and parental status can have on the career progression of women. The literature produced findings that were critical to the development of the study. The findings were then analysed and provided the basis upon which the research interview questions were formed. Through semi structured interviews the thoughts and perspectives of women at leadership level, with at least one child aged 0-14, were obtained. Following the qualitative research, the outputs were analysed and categorized thematically. From this analysis, five main themes emerged: Work Environment, Gender Roles, Presenteeism, Career Development and the Maternal Wall. These five themes were discussed sequentially in conjunction with previous studies and the literature reviewed. The dissertation then provides a thorough synopsis of the findings in regard to the contribution that remote working has had on the “Maternal Wall” at leadership level in an organisation in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. Finally, the research concludes with recommendations which can be used to supplement the continued success of remote working arrangements while dismantling the presence of the metaphorical “Maternal Wall” in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland.

## *Declaration*

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## *List of Abbreviations*

**CEO** – Chief Executive Officer

**CSO** – Central Statistics Office

**EIGE** – European Institute for Gender Equality

**GDPR** - General Data Protection Regulations

**Ibec** – Irish Business and Employers Confederation

**IHREC** – Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

**ISCED** – International Standard Classification of Education

**LFS** – Labour Force Survey

**OECD** – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**WFH** – Working from home

## ***Chapter 1 Introduction***

### ***1.1 Overview***

The purpose of this research is to analyse if the shift to remote working since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has augmented the presence of the ‘Maternal Wall’. In addition, this research will investigate whether this has had an impact upon the career development opportunities of mothers working remotely at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. For the purpose of this research, a mother is defined as a woman in employment, with at least one child aged 0-14, who lives in the same household, inclusive of biological, step or adoptive children. From here on, and throughout the research they will be defined as mothers.

### ***1.2 Justification for Research***

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a momentous impact upon the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. It has disrupted the lives of many workers by impacting upon their health, their careers and also the environments in which they worked. Many wholesale and retail workers bravely manned the front line and were instrumental in ensuring that the supply chain remained flowing, guaranteeing that we had food on our tables and clothes on our back. While the majority of the sector was customer facing, where reasonably possible, knowledge-based colleagues had to pivot and adapt to a more agile way of working by means of implementing remote working practices.

As Ireland emerges from the Covid-19 global pandemic, it has become abundantly clear that the Irish workforce hold a strong preference for remote working arrangements and that the future of work will be centred around flexible working models (Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2022b; McCarthy *et al.*, 2021; McGreevy, 2021a). However, there has been some apprehension, as commentators in the Irish media stipulate that remote working will disproportionately impact the career development of women (Holland, 2022; Walsh, 2022; Burke, 2021). Likewise, there has been a growing concern amongst researchers that an uptake in flexible working arrangements may lead to the emergence of a two-tiered workforce which will negatively impact upon the career development of women, particularly those with

children (Holland, 2022; Walsh, 2022; Burke, 2021; Chung *et al.*, 2021; Hickok, 2021; Lufkin, 2021; Peck, 2021; Alon *et al.*, 2020; Collins *et al.*, 2020).

While the Irish workforce has made huge strides in recent years in terms of gender diversity, women still remain to be greatly underrepresented at leadership level (European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2022). Over the last two decades researchers have thoroughly examined the socio-cultural aspects of the corporate environment which disproportionately impact women, namely Cross's (2010) seminal research on the barriers senior female managers face when progressing towards executive level roles in Ireland. While this study has been extremely beneficial in promoting gender equality in the workforce it is limited in terms of this research as it does not focus explicitly on the barriers a mother faces in the workforce.

Similar to the "Glass Ceiling", the term "Maternal Wall" was conceived by Swiss and Walker (1993) in relation to the barriers mothers encounter as they progress throughout their career. These barriers include but are not limited to the existence of a motherhood penalty (Waldfogel, 1995), heightened performance expectations (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004), bias towards pregnant woman (Halpert, Wilson and Hickman, 1993), negative competence assumptions (Okimoto and Heilman, 2012) and multiple other socio-political obstacles which impact a mother's return to work post pregnancy (Verniers and Vala, 2018). While these obstacles have been researched in industries such as technology (Williams, 2014), psychology (Grassetti *et al.*, 2019), academia (Williams, 2005) and wine production (Wright, 2020), until now, there is barely any research which has expressly researched the existence of the 'Maternal Wall' in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. Furthermore, there is little to no study which has explicitly investigated the contribution remote working has made to the existence of the 'Maternal Wall' in the wholesale and retail industry within Ireland. Given that remote working of the current scale is still relatively new in the Irish workforce, there is limited research on the topic. Therefore, there is an urgent need to study the impact of remote working arrangements from the perspective of women with children. Thus, the growing concern in the media and amongst researchers, combined with an extensive gap in the research, provide the justification for this research.

### 1.3 Research Question and Objectives

During the early stages of this research a list of primary questions were compiled in order to support the development of this project. In addition, the data gathered from secondary sources in the literature review built a solid foundation on which to base the primary research question and its aims. The literature suggests that there are a number of factors associated with mothers working remotely which contribute to the prevalence of the ‘Maternal Wall’. In constructing the research aim and objectives, it was essential to develop a better knowledge of the prevalence of the ‘Maternal Wall’. First, this involved understanding the extent to which the discrimination, stereotypes and biases associated with the ‘Maternal Wall’ have been amplified since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Second, to identify the implication they have had on the career development of women with children at leadership level, in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland.

Therefore, the primary research question is:

*“To what extent remote working has contributed to the “Maternal Wall” at leadership level, in the wholesale and retail industry, since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, in Ireland?”*

To achieve this the researcher must examine the following five research objectives:

1. To investigate whether remote working has adversely effected woman with children’s working environment in comparison to men with children.
2. To establish if mothers feel remote working arrangements contributes to the solidification of traditional gender roles.
3. To investigate if remote working encourages a corporate culture of ‘presenteeism’ which detrimentally impacts mothers.
4. To explore the impact that remote working is having on women with children’s attitudes towards their own training, development, and promotion opportunities.
5. To ascertain whether the remote working conditions have enhanced the pervasiveness of the ‘Maternal Wall’ in the wholesale and retail industry.

This study will draw influence from similar researcher conducted by Williams (2014; 2005), Grasseti *et al.* (2019) and Wright (2020) to ascertain if the phenomenon in question is present in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland and to what extent this impacts upon career development opportunities of working mothers.

## ***1.4 Structure of the Dissertation***

### **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

This chapter provides a brief overview of the research topic, a justification for this research, the main research question and objectives, and finally a synopsis of each chapter in this study.

### **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

This section of the research will provide a descriptive overview of relevant literature and critically analyse it, comparing and contrasting the main theoretical debates. This will focus on the influence that remote working has on the barriers that inhibit the career development opportunities of women with children. To obtain the necessary information a variety of academic resources were used such as e-journals and books. This review allowed the researcher and reader the opportunity to obtain a greater understanding of the impact that remote working can have on the presence of the ‘Maternal Wall’ and how this can affect the future career prospects of working mothers.

### **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the research methodology adopted by the researcher for this study, alongside a rationale for the selection of this method. This chapter begins by discussing research philosophy and the researchers approach to this study. The chapter then moves on to discuss the methodological choice that the author employed, providing an explanation for selecting qualitative research methods. The next section examines the options available to the researcher in their data collection and analysis techniques. The ethical considerations and potential limitations of the preferred methodological approach will be investigated. Finally, this chapter will provide a brief conclusion.

## **Chapter 4 – Findings**

This chapter outlines the findings from the previous chapters research. The author analysed the data collected through six in-depth semi structured interviews and categorized it thematically. The five main themes which emerged are closely associated with the five research objectives. The data produced was then presented in a logical manner to aid the readers understanding of the findings.

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

Compares and contrasts the literature of *Chapter 2* with the findings of the research from *Chapter 4*. The result of this comparison is then used to discuss the presence of the “Maternal Wall” and the contribution that remote working has towards its presence. This is discussed through the five main themes with the aim of answering the five research objectives and ultimately the overall research question.

## **Chapter 6 – Conclusion & Recommendations**

This is the concluding section of the dissertation. Here, the author summarizes the overall findings of the research, providing a clear and concise opinion based off of the research. The opinion is then used to provide recommendations, which can be used to improve the career prospects of working mothers while also benefitting the organisation. Additionally, the researcher provides a synopsis of the limitations of the research alongside some areas for further study.

## *Chapter 2 Literature Review*

### *2.1 Literature Review Overview*

This chapter will take a narrative approach to analyse the extent to which remote working contributes to the ‘Maternal Wall’, thus impacting upon working mothers career development. The literature has been structured in a way that allows the reader to gain an insight into what is driving the challenges encountered by working mothers, to what extent remote working has contributed to these barriers, and consequently what impact this has on the career development opportunities of working mothers.

First, the context of remote working in the wholesale and retail industry will be investigated, considering exactly how it has affected the working arrangements of mothers in Ireland since March 2020. Second, the literature review will analyse maternal employment rates in Ireland, paying particular attention to the factors which drive increased maternal employment. The research will then explore the benefits that working remotely has had on the career development of working mothers. While this research focuses predominantly on the extent to which remote working negatively contributes to the ‘Maternal Wall’, it is important to acknowledge the benefits to provide a well-balanced argument. The literature review will then concentrate on the crux of the research question the extent to which remote working contributes to the socially constructed barriers mothers experience that negatively impacts upon their career development:

- 1) *The Glass Ceiling*
- 2) *The ‘Maternal Wall’*
- 3) *The Motherhood Penalty*
- 4) *Gender Stereotypes*

### *2.2 The Impact of Covid-19 on Remote Working in the Wholesale and Retail Industry in Ireland*

Global research consultancy firm Gartner (2022) describes remote work as a flexible working arrangement which enables an employee to work from a location outside of the conventional

corporate office space. Despite the indication that remote working was on the rise in Ireland pre-pandemic (Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, 2019), CSO (2022b) indicate that only 23% of the Irish workforce had worked remotely at some stage prior to the Covid 19 pandemic. The subsequent spread of the virus transformed the way in which organisations and people work as overnight the majority of the working population adapted to new ways of working in their remote environments. CSO (2022b) figures demonstrate that 80% of Irish workers have claimed to have worked remotely at some point since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020.

While the vast majority of wholesale and retail workers in Ireland worked on the frontline throughout the pandemic, by the end of 2020, more than one in four people employed in the wholesale and retail industry were working remotely (CSO, 2022b), which equates to 70,000 of the 300,000 employees employed in retail across Ireland as reported by Retail Ireland Director Arnold Dillon (Ibec, 2020). Research conducted by McCarthy *et al.* (2021) found some interesting insights into the experiences of remote working employees in the wholesale and retail sector in Ireland. The results from this research suggest a strong preference for a blended work approach in Ireland in the future. For instance, as demonstrated in Figure 1, of those surveyed from the wholesale and retail industry, 97% indicated a preference for some form of remote working arrangement in the future. From that statistic 41% would like to work remotely daily, 47% would like to work remotely several times a week, 9% would like to work remotely several times a month, and the remaining 3% would not like to work remotely (McCarthy et al., 2021).

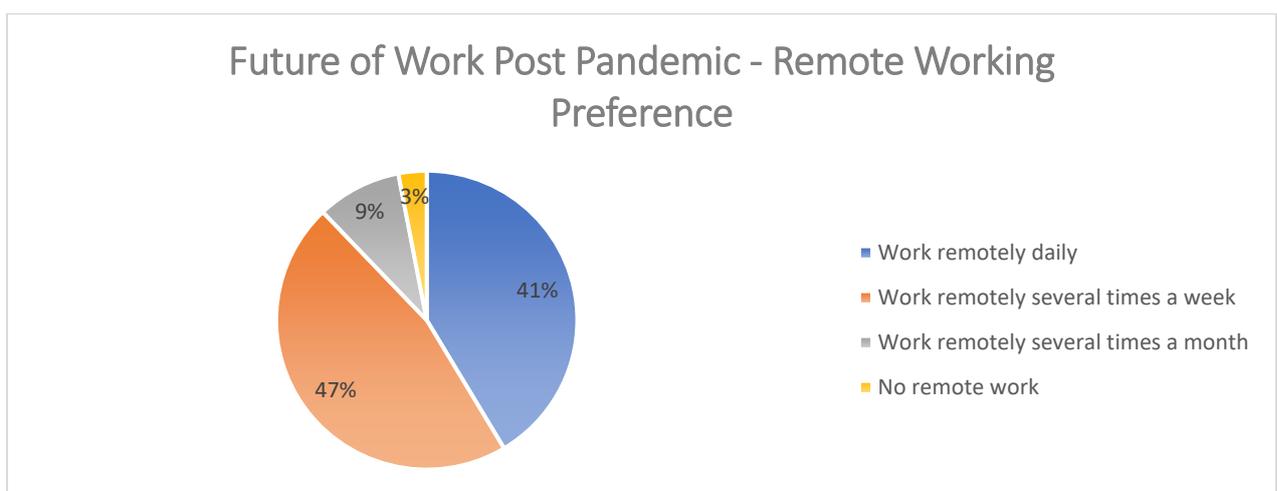


Figure 1 Future of work post pandemic - Remote working preference (McCarthy et al., 2021)

Having provided an overview of the current remote working conditions in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland, it is now necessary to outline the current situation in relation to female employment in Ireland with an enhanced focus on maternal employment rates.

## 2.3 Employment Rate in Ireland

### 2.3.1 Male versus Female

The term employment rate refers to the ratio of employed person, of a given age, relative to the total population of a comparable age category (Eurostat, 2020). Figure 3 below represents Irish employment rates of both males and females from Q4 2014 to Q4 2021 (CSO, 2022a). The figures shows that up until the pandemic, the employment rates of both male and females in Ireland had been steadily increasing year on year. With the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, employment rates dropped to 72.2% for males and 61.8% for females. However, as Ireland emerges from the pandemic and economic recovery begins, it is evident from the graph that there has been a sharp incline in employment rates, particularly in female employment rates. Despite this the graph shows that women are still less likely to be employed when compared with men, with 77% of males in employment versus 69% of females, at the end of Q4 2021.

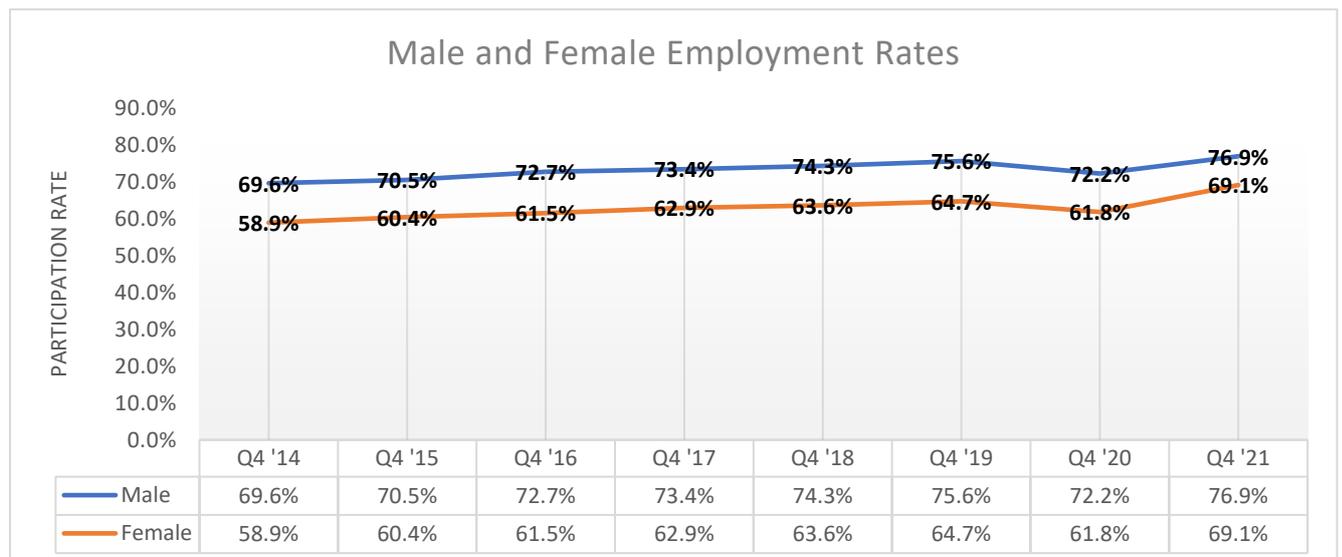


Figure 2 Male and Female Employment Rates 2014 – 2022 (CSO, 2022a).

### **2.3.2 Maternal employment rates**

The CSO (2022a) does not provide data on the maternal employment rates in Ireland, however research conducted by the OECD (2020) provides an overview of maternal employment rates up until 2019. While maternal employment rates fell slightly at the beginning of the ‘Great Recession’ in 2008, since then, they have been steadily increasing with 68% of women with at least one child aged 0-14, employed in Ireland at the end of 2019 (OECD, 2020). The increase in maternal employment rates across Ireland is driven by a number of factors. For instance, the research suggests that the rate of maternal employment increases with the age of the youngest child (OECD, 2020). Another important driver of maternal employment is the level of education attained by mothers. Mothers are more likely to be employed the higher their level of education (Eurostat, 2021b; Callaghan, Ivory and Lavelle, 2018). Irish maternal employment rates based on education are almost on par with the OECD average of 82%, with 80% of working mothers having attained an education between ISCED 2011 levels 5-8 (OECD, 2020).

Before proceeding to examine the potential benefits of remote working for mothers in Ireland, it is important to assess the impact that remote working has had on maternal employment rates. Coincidentally, despite the evidence that a higher percentage of females find it more difficult to work from home than men (CSO, 2020), research demonstrates that the shift to remote working throughout the Covid-19 pandemic aided the retention of mothers in the workforce. For instance, a recent study in Ireland found that 63% of respondents believe that the new ways of working since the onset of the pandemic have caused them to not to consider leaving their role, while only 3% had left their job to become a full-time caregiver (Matrix Recruitment, 2020). Likewise, a global survey of over 7,400 employees found that mothers are 32% less likely to leave their job if they have access to remote working opportunities (Van Bommel, 2021). The next part of the literature review will briefly examine the positive aspects of remote working which are fuelling the labour forces preference for remote working arrangements and increased maternal employment rates.

## 2.4 *Benefits of Remote Working for Mothers*

Remote working and its benefits have been discussed at length in academia. The majority of studies pay particular attention to the apparent benefit's that it poses for women with families and the positive effect that it can have on their work life balance. While this research focuses predominantly on the negative aspects of remote working, it is important to acknowledge the benefits of working remotely to provide a well-balanced argument.

Although remote working of the current scale is still relatively new in Ireland there was a growing demand prior to the pandemic as many working mothers sought to avail of remote working opportunities (Jobsite, 2018; Bloom, 2016). A report published by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (2019) prior to the pandemic detailed a strategy which aimed to place a focus on fostering participation in the labour force through flexible working arrangements. The report cites several benefits associated with remote working, for instance the positive environmental impact, increased female labour participation, improved wellbeing, and enhanced productivity. In addition to the benefits listed in this report, evidence of such is also littered throughout literature. For instance, ter Hoeven and van Zoonen (2015) research found that working remotely can create a better work/life balance, increase job autonomy, and improve employee wellbeing. Similarly, Sullivan (2012) highlights benefits such as reduces stress, enhanced work-life balance, and increased job satisfaction, while Sherman (2019) highlights the benefit's of remote working in regard to overall wellbeing. In terms of mother specific benefits, Chung and van der Horst's (2018) research demonstrates how flexible working arrangements can help mothers to maintain their workload after childbirth, while Fuller and Hirsh's (2019) research demonstrates evidence that flexible arrangements can enable women to remain in their jobs in times of high family demand. Ferrante (2018) simply states that working mothers need "one thing" to overcome the 'Maternal Wall' and that is the flexibility to successfully integrate their work and family lives.

However, despite the connotation that remote working may facilitate greater work-life balance and enhanced performance, CSO (2020) statistics demonstrate that a larger percentage of Irish woman found it harder to work from home with their family around than men during the pandemic. Likewise, recent research from Xiao *et al.* (2021) found that mothers may find it more challenging to work from home as they can feel additional pressure

to fulfil household chores and take care of children. This indicates that there may be more to remote working than meets the eye which could ultimately have troubling consequences for women's career opportunities in the long-term. In order to ensure that women are afforded equal career opportunities, it is critical to explore the socially constructed obstacles which they must overcome while working in a remote working environment. Therefore, the next section of the research will aim to dissect some of the challenges which mothers face in the workplace.

## ***2.5 Negatives of Remote Working for Mothers***

There has been a growing concern that an uptake in flexible working arrangements may lead to the emergence of a “two-tiered workforce” which will negatively impact upon the career development of women, particularly mothers which treats men more favourably (Alon *et al.*, 2020; Burke, 2021; Chung *et al.*, 2021; Collins *et al.*, 2020; Hickok, 2021; Holland, 2022; Lufkin, 2021, Peck, 2021; Walsh, 2022). The presence of more men in the physical office environment could ultimately increase gender inequality across the workforce by reinforcing traditional gender roles, obstructing women's career progression opportunities, many of which are positively correlated with in-person work. The focus of this research is to examine to what extent remote working arrangements will add to the socio-political obstacles that mothers already experience as they progress through their careers relative to men. These barriers can be considered as the bricks that form the theoretical construct known as the ‘Maternal Wall’. However, before delving deeper into the issues which impact mothers specifically, it is critical to first address the obstacles that women face relative to men, also known as the “glass ceiling”.

### ***2.5.1 The Glass Ceiling***

Promoting gender equality between men and women is a key ambition of the current Irish Government with an overarching aim of working towards an “Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential, while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life” (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2021). This goal is

supported by six key objectives as set out in the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017). Objective 4, “*Advance Women in Leadership at All Levels*” (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017, p. 57) is of particular importance to this research as it details the Irish Government’s strategic framework to address gender inequality in the labour force. In furtherance of achieving this target the Irish Government has also established a review group, ‘Balance for Better Business’ who actively engage with businesses to encourage gender equality at C-suite level in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2021). However, while this demonstrates that Ireland is moving in the right direction towards achieving gender equality in Ireland, a substantial gender gap remains in place at leadership level. This is particularly evident in the upper echelons of organisations in Ireland, which will be discussed below.

Despite major advancements, the workplace still remains a stronghold of gender inequality as many women continue to face challenging obstacles when attempting to climb the corporate ladder. For example, a recent study by the United Nations Development Programme (2020) found that almost 90% of men and women hold some level of bias towards women. Bias or discrimination towards women in the workplace has been well documented in what is often described as the ‘glass ceiling’. The metaphor, which was originally coined in 1984, depicts the often-intangible barriers that prevent highly successful women from reaching the peak of their professional careers (Boyd, 2008). These barriers may be attributed to several factors such as overcoming traditional gender roles, a lack of support in balancing domestic and professional responsibilities and finally the presence of corporate cultures which disproportionately benefit men (Eurostat, 2021a). Alarmingly, almost 70% of respondents in (Matrix Recruitment, 2020) report found that the “glass ceiling” exists as a barrier to women’s career development in Ireland. For example, Figure 4 represents the number of women in senior management positions from 2012 – 2021. This graph indicates that while there has been a steady increase in the number of women in senior management positions, women still only account for 30% of the positions (EIGE, 2022). Although this figure has more than trebled in the last 10 years, men still dominate decision making environments leaving women greatly underrepresented at leadership level.

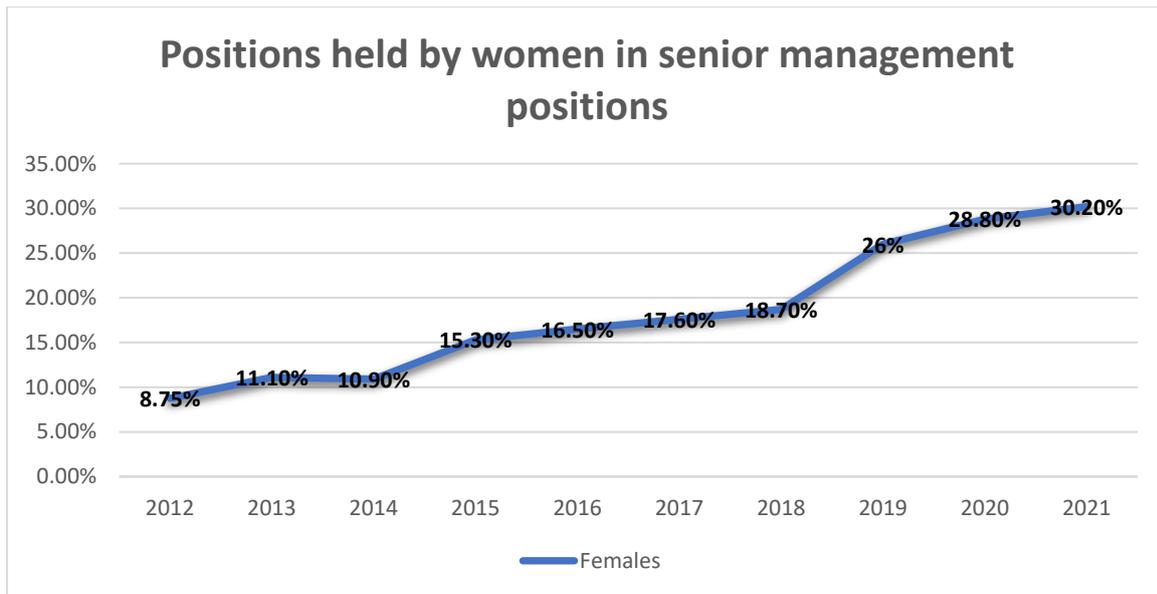


Figure 3 Positions held by women in senior management positions (EIGE, 2022).

Although there are no figures available to represent the percentage of mothers at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland, it is fair to assume that the figure is the same as, or lower than, that of women without children, and therefore considerably lower than that of men in leadership positions. This leads the reader to the next section of this literature review, which will explore barriers that specifically inhibit the career development of working mothers.

### 2.5.2 The ‘Maternal Wall’

The glass ceiling is not the only obstacle which hinders the career development opportunities of mothers. The ‘Maternal Wall’, a term coined by Swiss and Walker (1993), brings with it a new set of socially constructed barriers which impede the career progression of mothers in the workplace. Incidentally, working mothers are often blindsided by the ‘Maternal Wall’ before they can even reach the glass ceiling (Williams and Segal, 2003). For example, 82% of working mothers within the US, have expressed a concern that being a mother has resulted in additional barriers which are inhibit them from reaching their full potential as leaders (Bright Horizons, 2019). Figure 4 outlines many of the factors that contribute to the ‘Maternal Wall’.

Motherhood Penalty	Two-tiered Workforce	Unequal Access	Glass Ceiling	Male Dominated
Gender Inequality	Traditional Gender Roles	“Bad Parent” Guilt	Bias	Heightened Performance Expectations
Prejudice	<b>The ‘Maternal Wall’</b>			Reduced Salaries
Dual Burden	Stereotypes	Gender Segregation	Stigma	Fatherhood Premium
Patriarchy	Siloes	Discrimination	Restricted Career Options	Proximity Bias

Figure 4 - Factors which contribute to the ‘Maternal Wall’

For instance:

- The existence of a motherhood penalty (Waldfogel, 1995)
- Heightened performance expectations for mothers (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004)
- Bias towards pregnant woman in their performance appraisals (Halpert *et al.*, 1993)
- Assumptions that a woman is a bad mother for working in a male dominated industry or occupation (Okimoto and Heilman, 2012)
- Several other socio-political obstacles which impact a mothers return to work post pregnancy (Verniers and Vala, 2018).

Williams and Segal (2003) ascertain that prejudice towards mothers in the workplace typically begin at three points. The first point at which it may become evident is when a woman initially becomes pregnant. For example, a seminal study by Halpert *et al.* (1993) details how female managers performance reviews “plummeted” once they became pregnant as pregnancy galvanizes the stereotype of pregnant women being irrational and exceedingly emotive. Alternatively, Williams and Segal (2003) suggest that maternal bias may become apparent at the point when a woman becomes a mother and include a quote from a mother, who stated, “I had a baby, not a lobotomy” (p. 91) in reaction to negative competence assumptions. Finally, the third point at which maternal bias becomes apparent in a working

mother's career, and perhaps the most relevant to this study, is when a mother engages in a flexible working arrangement, such as working remotely (Williams and Segal, 2003).

This phenomenon is particularly evident at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. Despite the prevalence of highly competent women within the workforce, educated working mothers remain drastically underrepresented. For instance, the figures released by the CSO (2021a) show that only 30% of senior executive positions are held by women within the wholesale and retail industry of Ireland. The data also provides further clarity on how women continue to be mis-represented at senior leadership level as only 20% of director level positions and 13% of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland are held by a woman (CSO, 2021a). As previously mentioned, while the data provided by the CSO (2021a) does not specifically demonstrate the representation of mothers at leadership level, it is fair to deduce that the percentage of mothers at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland is less than, or equal to, the number of women in the figures released by the CSO (2021a).

The following parts of this literature review will describe in greater detail, first the barriers which contribute to the construction of the 'Maternal Wall', second to what extent remote working adds to this, and third what effect this has on the career development of working mothers.

### ***2.5.3 The Motherhood Penalty***

One of the many barriers to success for a mother is the existence of a 'motherhood penalty'. Waldfogel (1995) and Budig and England (2001) argue that many mothers encounter a 'motherhood penalty' whereby they experience systematic disadvantages in the workplace in comparison to men or women without children. A Bright Horizons (2019) study gathered some formidable findings which strongly suggests that women do face a motherhood penalty. For instance, 72% of working men and women report that women are penalised professionally for becoming a parent, however this does appear to be the case for men (Bright Horizons, 2019). While this figure represents findings from a study in the US, statistics from Ireland correlate with this figure – e.g., results from the Matrix Recruitment (2020) Workplace Equality Report found that 77% of participants felt that becoming a parent had had an impact on women's career progression. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that 73% of women think that their career development opportunities are limited in comparison to

women without children, with 71% of female respondents, who are not mothers, agreeing with this statement (Matrix Recruitment, 2020).

Research suggests that women are often steered towards downsizing their career ambitions and are moved into positions of lower pay at the expense of becoming a mother. There are many examples of the ‘Motherhood Penalty’ in practice throughout academic research. For example:

- Gash (2009) found that over 60% of women who worked part time had their careers in some way restricted, with many accepting less attractive employment on reduced salaries or hours to accommodate their domestic duties.
- McIntosh *et al.*’s (2012) study supports the findings of Gash (2009) and found that the longer that mothers spend on career break, the less likely they are to progress in their career, with career opportunities gradually decreasing with the arrival of each new child.
- Similarly, Glass (2004) found that women who reduced their hours experienced slower wage growth.
- Kalleber and Reskin (1995) concluded that mothers received fewer promotions
- Stone and Hernandez (2013) assert that mothers are penalised by receiving lower-quality work assignments.
- Cukrowska-Torzewska and Matysiak (2020) meta analysis of the motherhood wage penalty posits that mothers tend to receive lower wages than comparable childless women.

While all these penalties detrimentally impact upon the career development opportunities of women, this study aims to focus on the contribution that remote working – in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic – will have on the career progression of mothers.

### ***2.5.3.1 The Motherhood Penalty and Remote Working Arrangements***

A recent study by Collins *et al.* (2020) suggests that the recent shift to remote working has already led to mothers incurring a penalty as mothers have already made more professional sacrifices than men. Peck (2020) agrees with Collins *et al.* (2020) and utilises conservation of

resources theory to detail the disproportionate impact that the pandemic has had on women relative to men. The research suggests that women were already detrimentally impacted relative to men prior to the pandemic but that the resources lost as a result of the pandemic will likely “outpace any small gains that may be achieved” (Peck, 2020, p. 493). Likewise, a study conducted by Clark *et al.* (2021) investigated the impact of Covid-19 on working Irish mothers and found that they have been negatively impacted in relation to their psychological and emotional wellbeing. The mothers surveyed expressed their difficulty in juggling their work life balance, while trying to work from home and they detailed the impact that the pandemic had on them psychologically and described how they felt remote working had impacted upon their career development (Clark *et al.*, 2021). The results from Matrix Recruitment’s (2021) *Workplace Equity Report* correlate with Collins *et al.*’s (2020) and Clark *et al.*’s (2021) findings, stating that of those surveyed, 36% of respondents found that the working conditions since the onset of the pandemic had created workplace inequality which disproportionately impacts upon those with children. Of that figure, 54% stated that more was expected of mothers as they juggled their personal and professional lives during the pandemic (Matrix Recruitment, 2021).

#### **2.5.4 Gender Stereotypes**

In addition to the penalties that mothers face, they often also experience significant barriers as a result of gender stereotypes. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2014), gender stereotyping may be defined as the act of assigning specific traits, qualities, or roles to either men or women solely based off his or her affiliation to their gender. Bell (2017), Heilman and Okitomo (2008), Madsen, Townsend and Scribner (2020) and Tabassum and Nayak (2021) explore the implications that gender stereotypes have on women’s career opportunities. Their research suggests that gender stereotyping can be extremely harmful, affording males more influence in the workplace while depriving women of their professional influence.

Gill (2004) and Heilman (2001) distinguish between descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes, both of which can both be harmful to the career progression of working mothers. Descriptive stereotypes are based on beliefs of how males and females typically act. Societal narratives tend to describe women as care givers, who are therefore sympathetic, warm, sensitive, and

cooperative, while men are often seen to be protectors or strong leaders and therefore must be competitive, independent, aggressive, and arrogant (Ciccio, Bronson and Contrada, 2020; Koenig, 2018; Heilman and Okimoto, 2007). In contrast prescriptive stereotypes depict how gender groups “should” act in order to avoid ridicule and non-acceptance from other group members (Heilman and Okimoto, 2007). For example, mothers are more caring and should be at home with a baby more than the father. Then, if a mother engages in a behaviour, which would typically be expected of a man they are perceived as less nurturing and less competent than a father e.g., a mother being viewed as less communal for returning to the workforce soon after the birth of child or staying late in the office while children are in childcare facilities.

The next section of the literature review will look at the impact that gender stereotypes have on the career development of working mothers as they balance professional and domestic duties in a remote working arrangement.

#### **2.5.4.1 Dual Burden**

Eagly’s (1987) social role theory posits that gender stereotypes are derived from the segregation of men and women in accordance with the differences and similarities in their roles within their society. Eagly and Wood (2016) and Ciccio *et al.* (2020) ascertain that parental status contributes to these stereotypes as historically mothers are perceived as the primary caregivers while men are viewed as the primary providers. Likewise, in the workplace women tend to be employed in occupations which are people focused, such as teachers or nurses, while men tend to be employed in more competitive object-based occupations such as engineers or accountants. The conflicting social roles of male and females, and the interpretations that they prompt, results in the formulation of gender stereotypes which can negatively impact upon the career development opportunities of women (Koenig and Eagly, 2014).

In 2021 the Irish Citizens Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of radically reforming elements of the Irish Constitution, namely Article 41.2 which archaically refers to a women’s place in society as “within the home” and that a mother shall not “neglect their duties in the home” to benefit economically (McGreevy, 2021b). While this outdated clause does not represent the overarching views of modern Irish society there is still evidence that women,

particularly mothers are being constrained in their careers due to their gender and parental status. For instance, a Eurostat (2021a) statistic demonstrates that when compared with their male counterparts' Irish women are less likely to progress in their careers as they spend more of the day managing family life, while over 50% of Irish respondents in a European Commission (2017) survey stated that "the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family".

Furthermore, although the borders of traditional gender roles are becoming slightly less defined in modern society, it is a well-established fact that women are more likely than men to experience the challenge of balancing their personal and professional lives (Chung and van der Horst, 2018). The imbalance in the distribution of domestic responsibilities can lead to many women, and mothers, undertaking a significant amount of unpaid domestic labour, a term which Arlie Hochschild termed the "second shift" in their seminal research (Hochschild and Machung, 2012). For example, empirical evidence shows that in addition to their professional responsibilities, women undertake most domestic duties, spending on average 19.7 hours per week on care or household duties while men spend only 9.2 hours (Russell *et al.*, 2019). Likewise, the most recent analysis of parental domestic duties in Ireland has found that 70% of female respondents said that they are more responsible for household duties and the purchasing and preparation of meals relative to men with children (CSO, 2021b).

Recent research by Chung and van der Lippe (2018) proposes that remote working will have a detrimental impact on the career development of women as it may strengthen these gender roles and stereotypes. Likewise, Rubery and Tavora (2020, p.92) point out that "new forms of gender segregation could emerge if women are not only expected to telework but in fact remain home-based workers while men return to the office". A recent study conducted by Anderson (2021) on behalf of IBEC also supports the theory that remote working arrangements have negatively impacted upon the career development opportunities of women, particularly mothers, relative to men. For example, 20% of those surveyed noticed a change in the position of women in their organisation as a result of maternal responsibilities such as childminding, home-schooling, and increased flexibility (Anderson, 2021).

Furthermore, almost half of respondents stated that women had requested more time off than men to in order to facilitate caring responsibilities while 31% of respondents stated that more females than males had requested unpaid time off to facilitate caregiving responsibilities in the previous 12 months (Anderson, 2021). Additionally, a survey conducted in the UK shows that throughout the lockdown mothers were reportedly interrupted by children twice as much

as fathers were (Andrews *et al.*, 2020). The contrasting division of labour can largely be attributed to the acceptance of traditional gender roles in society over time. This will further amplify inequality, as men will utilise remote working as an opportunity to enhance their performance, while mothers will feel a responsibility to fulfil their “dual role” as a caregiver and as a professional (Chung and van der Lippe, 2018). This constant struggle to juggle the two roles can also lead to long term implications such as stress and guilt which can play a huge part in career development, and often times ends in mothers opting out of the workforce when their children are of the age to go to school (Choi *et al.*, 2017).

#### ***2.5.4.2 Negative Competence Assumptions***

Another significant barrier to the career development of mothers is the prevalence of negative competence assumptions, whereby mothers are considered to be less capable than an individual without children. Gender stereotypes, when combined with parenthood, can polarize judgements of women and men such that mothers are held to a higher standard than fathers, as motherhood is assumed to reduce efficiency and lower performance (Williams, 2004). The assumption is often based off the perception that mothers have a reduced work commitment and that they may unsettle normal working routine (Gatrell, 2011). For example, a manager assuming that because demographically women limit their working hours when they become mothers, that all mothers will do so (Williams, 2005). The results from the Matrix Recruitment (2020) found that almost 60% of those surveyed said they feel that employers may hold an unconscious bias towards mothers, suggesting that the discrimination may often begin before a woman enters motherhood.

Eagly and Karau’s (2002) role congruity theory proposes that the apparent discord between females and leadership roles leads to two types of prejudice. In this instance women are perceived as the less favourable option for a leadership role when compared with their male counterparts due to their maternal responsibilities. Acker (1990) proposes that these stereotypical assumptions may be utilised to control and exclude women in the workplace. Bornstein (2013) develops upon this and states that women are subjected to bias and discrimination in a patriarchal culture, which impacts upon their career development. It goes without saying that this can have a huge impact on the career development opportunities of

mothers as they are placed under greater scrutiny and therefore may not be eligible to receive the same opportunities available to their male counterparts.

#### **2.5.4.3 Presenteeism**

Taking what is known in relation to presenteeism into consideration, experts are warning that remote working may lead to artificial siloes and cliques in which you end up with a two-tiered workforce which treats men more favourably (Lufkin, 2021). Similarly, Osman (cited in Dallon, 2021) has warned that remote working arrangements could lead to a two-tiered workforce in which “those who spend more time in the office would be treated as first-class, and those who spend more time remotely would be treated as second-class”. For example, results from the Matrix Recruitment (2020) *Workplace Equality Report* found that only 37% of working mothers feel that they have the same access to opportunities as the rest of their peers. Likewise, results from Matrix Recruitment’s (2021) latest survey show that more than half of respondents are worried that they may be forgotten about during meetings if they adopt a remote working arrangement. In addition, 48% are concerned that their manager will question their professional commitment if they decide to work remotely (Matrix Recruitment, 2021). Finally, almost half of participants were concerned that they may not be considered for a promotion due to their lack of presenteeism, while 40% are worried that they may miss out on opportunities to take part in forthcoming projects (Matrix Recruitment, 2021).

Additionally, a fundamental element in promoting gender equality in the workplace is ensuring that both men and women have equivalent access to resources and opportunities. Tomei (2021) suggests that a remote working arrangement such as a hybrid working model creates a risk of ‘invisibility’ for women. For example, as men do not equally share the domestic caregiving responsibilities, women’s career opportunities are at risk of becoming significantly compromised. Remote working arrangements such as hybrid working may lead to men spending more time in the office networking, learning, engaging, and innovating with greater access to business information and more efficient technologies. This in turn reinforces Eagly and Wood’s (2016) social role theory which proposes that fathers are more reliable in providing food and shelter for the family unit, while women are better carers. For instance, a manager sending a mother home from work early, as the primary caregiver of the house, while expecting a father to work later as the primary financial support. While this form of

stereotyping often stems from good intentions, it does not excuse it as it contributes towards gender and maternal biases which segregate men and women into traditional gender roles. Tomei (2021) claims that this bias translates into preferential treatment for fathers over mothers in what is known as the the “motherhood penalty”, which was discussed above. The stigma associated with mothers working remotely can be detrimental to their career progression opportunities as it taints their image as an ‘ideal worker’ – someone who demonstrates an unyielding commitment to their job (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015). Consequently, due to their additional workloads and disruptions in the home, women may appear not to be as “present” as their male counterparts (Alon *et al.*, 2020). This can lead to proximity bias which assumes that those in the office are more productive than those working remotely (Knight, 2020). Mothers are then perceived as having a reduced capability to focus and meet the expectations of their employers, ultimately impacting upon their career development relative to men (Masherini and Bisello, 2020). A study conducted by Donovan and Wright (2013) found that there is a strong management culture of presenteeism in Ireland with 69% of respondents holding the view that remote workers are simply “dossing”. Solis (2017) ascertains that distrust between a manager and a remote employee will ultimately result in decreased job performance and loss of career development opportunities. On the otherhand, Brower *et al.* (2009) detail a clear link between feeling trusted and improved job performance. Thus, trust between a manager and a remote worker is a critical element in ensuring a satisfactory job performance.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

In reviewing the literature, the researcher began by providing context on remote working in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The data presents an overwhelming preference for remote working arrangements in the future (CSO, 2022b; McCarthy *et al.*, 2021; McGreevy, 2021a). The researcher then investigated the presence of mothers in the Irish workforce. The analysis found that despite the prevalence of a highly competent, educated working mothers, mothers remain to be drastically underrepresented at leadership level within the industry (CSO, 2021a). Thus, the research aims to explore the impact that remote working is having on this trend. The key findings and authors are detailed in Appendix A.

The researcher examined a large body of research which focused on the perceived benefits of remote working such as enhanced wellbeing, increased job performance and greater work life balance (Fuller and Hirsh, 2019; Sherman, 2019; Chung and van der Horst, 2018; Sullivan, 2012). While there is evidence to suggest that the positives of remote working may outweigh the negative, experts have raised concerns that remote working arrangements may detrimentally impact upon the career development of women, particularly mothers (Holland, 2022; Walsh, 2022; Burke, 2021; Chung *et al.*, 2021; Hickok, 2021; Peck, 2021; Alon *et al.*, 2020; Collins *et al.*, 2020). These studies shed some light on the impact of remote working during a period of forced flexibility – the studies indicate that remote working will continue into the future and therefore this research findings will hold relevance for the future.

The research of Alon *et al.* (2020), Burke (2021), Hickock (2021), Holland (2022) and Walsh (2022) possess limitations. While the publications provide a comprehensive overview of the potential implications that remote working may have, they fail to present any new findings and instead are based off secondary data and opinion. An alternative limitation in the review of literature was the depth of the research findings. For instance, although Chung *et al.* (2021) collected a large amount of information through an online survey, the data is limited in that it is very high level and does not provide the rich in-depth insight of the lived experiences of working mothers that a qualitative research methodology could provide. Likewise, Collins *et al.* (2020) explored the impact that Covid-19 had on the division of labour through quantitative research methods. This research did however provide much richer data than that of Chung *et al.* (2021). The review of the literature found that while a vast amount of research has remained mother-centred, there is limited research which focuses explicitly on the ‘Maternal Wall’ and that there is more so an increased focus on the theme of gender equality in its entirety.

## *Chapter 3 Methodology*

### *3.1 Methodology Introduction*

The following chapter describes the methods that were used to collect information on the experiences of mothers working remotely in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research strategy that is used throughout this thesis is based upon the findings of Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis (2019) ‘research onion’.

### *3.2 Research Philosophy*

Burrell and Morgan (2016) ascertain that all researchers in social science will make implicit or explicit assumptions about the very essence of the world (ontological) and the manner in which it may be examined (epistemological). Ontology may be defined as “the study of being, the nature of being, and our ways of the world”, while epistemology may be interpreted as “knowledge, what constitutes knowledge and to the process through which knowledge is created” (Quinlan *et al.*, 2019, p. 57).

Ontological assumptions outline the way in which the researcher views and examines research objects or individuals. According to Rossman and Rallis (2016, p.8) objectivism assumes that “reality exists independent of human cognition”. Objectivist researchers uncover facts, study the relationship between one set of facts and another, which then lead to quantifiable generalisations. Thus, objectivist researchers generally utilise quantitative methods of researching. On the other hand, Saunders *et al.* (2019, p.137) ascertain that subjectivism is based upon the assumption that reality is socially constructed by the thoughts and actions of people in their roles as “social actors”. In contrast to an objective approach to research, subjective researchers seek to collate the differing opinions, narratives and realities of the numerous social actors. Considering this, this research aims to explore and interpret the thoughts and perspectives of mothers, as social actors, the researcher holds a subjective view.

The epistemological stance is generally determined by the nature of the research, its aim, and the type of data necessary to complete the research (Crotty, 1998). Epistemological assumptions can usually tell the reader something of the ontological positioning of the researcher and will essentially rule what is considered admissible in the research (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The two main epistemological positions utilised in social research are positivism and interpretivism. Positivism is founded upon the basis that reality is objective, external and that observations are made with certainty (Bryman and Bell, 2015). As a research philosophy, positivism can be described as a method which suggests that relationships are best analysed through measured empiricism (Walle, 2015). Therefore, positivist researchers generally start with a theory, then examine quantitative data to produce measurable conclusions (Anderson, Fontinha and Robson, 2020). This limits the researcher to collecting and interpreting data in an objective way. Therefore, this would not be a suitable approach for this study as it would not allow for detailed information to be obtained from the participants through observation (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Interpretivism can be utilised to gain a greater understanding of information which relates to how people construe the world and how they act based on their assumptions (Hammersley, 2013) and is explicitly subjectivist (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Lee and Lings (cited in Anderson *et al.*, 2020) detail the characteristics of an interpretive researcher as someone who demonstrates a desire to understand rather than to explain, expresses an interest in the study of experiences, does not need to reduce variables to a measurable amount and finally, as someone who assumes that reality is socially constructed in a collective and moving way. In addition, interpretive researchers generally favour qualitative data which is the data collection method used in this research. Considering the research aim, the researcher worked from an interpretivist perspective, collecting information based upon experiences of mothers to understand the extent to which remote working has contributed to the socially constructed 'Maternal Wall' in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland.

### **3.3 Research Approach**

When undertaking research there are two approaches a researcher can adopt. These are known as 'deductive' and 'inductive' (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). In their book, Saunders *et al.* (2019) acknowledge that a deductive approach is generally associated with scientific research

as it is concerned with the development of a theory which is then rigorously tested through a number of propositions. On the contrary, they believe an inductive approach refers to the collection of data on which the researcher generates a theory. While an inductive approach allows for a smaller sample of participants to take part in in-depth interviews and is generally informed by an interpretivist approach linked with qualitative data, the researcher opted for a deductive approach. This method allowed the social reality of the mother's own experiences to develop as the author examined the extent to which remote working has contributed to the prevalence of the 'Maternal Wall' in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland based upon the key themes examined within the literature review.

### **3.4 Methodological Choice**

The three designs mainly utilised by researchers are qualitative, quantitative and a mixed method approach. The design utilised by a researcher varies depending on the tradition within which the researcher is working in. As previously mentioned, positivist researchers who adopt an objectivist approach generally favour the scientific method, utilising quantitative research strategies (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). Quantitative data is based on fact or measurable figures from which conclusions can be drawn. This research design is appropriate when factual data is required to answer the research question (Hammarberg, Kirkman and de Lacey, 2016). In contrast, interpretivist researchers favour qualitative data which is based on information that is expressed through words and language, enabling researchers to explore information through the participants own experiences, thus gaining meaning and perspective (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). A mixed method research design makes use of both qualitative and quantitative data in a manner which enables the material to be collectively informative (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

One of the many reasons why the author employed a qualitative methodology is that the research philosophy and approach discussed in the previous sections align to qualitative research methods. Additionally, Dawson (2013) suggests that qualitative research is useful in exploring attitudes, behaviour, and experiences through conducting interviews. Considering the research aims to understand through the participants own experiences, a qualitative research strategy was deemed appropriate as the researcher could conduct in-depth interviews. While there are a limited number of studies which utilise qualitative research

methods to explore the “Maternal Wall”, there are an abundance of studies which employ qualitative research methods to investigate a similar phenomenon, the “Glass Ceiling” (Patton and Haynes, 2014; Wrigley, 2002; Parzinger and Lemons, 2001). While quantitative research was considered, the author is of the opinion that numerical data would not provide sufficient knowledge required to address the research question or aims. Furthermore, while the researcher contemplated a mixed method approach, this approach was not possible due to time constraints. Therefore, qualitative research was deemed to be more applicable to the research’s aim and objectives.

### **3.5 Sample**

When conducting case study research, it is imperative to clearly set out the definition of the ‘case’ (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The ‘case’ in this study refers to mothers, at leadership level, who work remotely, within an organisation in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. As previously stated, for the purpose of this research a mother constitutes a woman in employment, with at least one child aged 0-14, who lives in the same household, inclusive of biological, step or adoptive children.

The sample size was determined taking into consideration what the research intends to find out through the semi structured interviews, what will be deemed reliable and what is possible within the timeframe. Saunders *et al.* (2019) suggest between four and twelve participants for a homogenous qualitative study. Therefore, a smaller sample size of 6 mothers was deemed applicable.

The researcher utilised their judgement and purposive sampling to select mothers, known to be at leadership level in different positions across the organisation. This method of sampling was used as the researcher needed participants who could best answer the research questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). An email invitation was specifically sent to ten potential participants who were all mothers at leadership level within the organisation. In the email, the researcher explained the background of the research and invited them to participate (Appendix B). As a result of the email, six participants expressed an interest in participating in the study.

### 3.6 Data Collection

An exploratory study is a useful when gaining insight into a topic as it allows the researcher the opportunity to ask open questions that are likely to begin with ‘what’ or ‘how’ (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Saunders *et al.* (2019) suggest that utilising semi-structured interviews may be useful in a number of different situations; when undertaking explorative research, when it is necessary to establish a personal connection with the participant, when the questions are predominantly open ended and when there are time constraints in gathering data. Contrarily, collecting quantitative data via structured interviews is not deemed as appropriate for explorative research (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Instead, it may be appropriate in circumstances where the researcher is confident that the research questions will be interpreted the same way by all participants (Robson and McCartan, 2016). As the research question aims to clarify an understanding of a phenomenon in an explorative manner, it was evident to the researcher that a mono-mothed qualitative approach, via semi-structured interviews was favourable.

In preparation for the interview, the findings from the literature review alongside the research question and objectives were utilised to create a draft set of interview questions (See Appendix C). The research questions were reviewed by the researcher’s supervisor and modifications were made based upon the feedback (See Appendix D). The predetermined interview questions were updated to primarily open-ended questions to garner the most genuine responses from the participants. Taking into consideration the modifications the researcher compiled an interview matrix structure to organise the research questions based upon the research question and objectives (See Appendix E). Prior to each interview the researcher shared the participant information sheet (See Appendix F) and a consent form (See Appendix G) with all participants.

Additionally, a pilot interview was conducted with a HR Director in the organisation in order to ensure the researcher demonstrated the competence and capability necessary to collect quality data. Malmqvist *et al.* (2019) state that conducting a pilot interview is necessary to ensure high research quality when a depth of understanding is sought. Following the pilot interview, the researcher created an interview guide (Appendix H) which contained some opening commentary, the list of interview questions categorised by theme, some prompts, and closing remarks.

Saunders *et al.* (2019) recommend that interviews take place in the participants workplace as they are more likely to feel safe to answer open ended questions. While the researcher originally intended for the interviews to take place, in person, at the participants place of work, they took place via Microsoft Teams. Hanna (2012) favours web conferencing interviews as they have similar benefits as those listed by (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Web conferencing enables the participants to remain in a confidential familiar location in which they can answer the questions asked safely.

To increase the participant's trust and reduce the likelihood of interview or response bias the researcher opened each interview with a warm welcome, explaining the purpose of the research and reassuring participants that the data collected will remain entirely anonymous (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The researcher asked each participant for their continued consent to take part in the research, explained the necessity to audio-record the interview, and likewise asked for their consent to do so.

The 6 interviews were scheduled over four days and the researcher found that with each interview the flow and quality improved greatly. To ensure interpretive reliability, the researcher avoided the use of leading questions and instead the interview questions were predominantly open-ended questions. This allowed the researcher to maintain control and provided flexibility to respond to any themes which emerged during the interview (Given, 2012). Similarly, this question format enabled the researcher to 'probe' the participants to build upon their answers in order to fully understand their meaning of the phenomena. Each interview was recorded and transcribed instantly, and keynotes were taken throughout the interview. At the end of the interview each participant was offered the opportunity to read the transcript and view the notes the researcher had taken in order to clarify or expand upon any points.

#### ***4.6 Data Analysis***

The researcher utilised Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematically analyse the data collected from the six semi-structured interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is particularly suitable for researchers in the early stages of their qualitative research career as it does not require the exhaustive theoretic and technical knowledge associated with other analytical theories. As previously mentioned the researcher adopted a

deductive method and approached the data with preconceived ideas on what to expect in the data. This resulted in the researcher taking a theoretical approach to thematic analysis as the literature was engaged with prior to analysis.

The researcher analysed the data collected from the interviews across several stages as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006) in their step-by-step guide. The researcher first transcribed the data (Appendix I-N), immersing herself fully to identify patterns and meanings. Then, the researcher began producing the initial codes organising the unit's of data into purposeful groupings, using Microsoft Excel (Appendix O). Next, the researcher undertook a broader logical analysis of the data set, sorting the codes into possible themes which related back to the research question. The next stage of the analysis involved distilling the themes and reviewing the connection between them, assessing their validity. Initially the researcher was not satisfied that the themes formed a coherent pattern and thus, the data extracts were reviewed and rejigged to provide a comprehensive thematic map. Following on from this, the author then identified the 'essence' of what each theme is about in relation to the research question, ensuring that there was not too much crisscrossing of themes. The final stage in the data analysis process involved writing up the final detailed narrative analysis or the findings of the research in Chapter 6. The researcher utilised examples and extracts from the data set to validate and provide context to the arguments being made, without becoming overly complex or simply just providing a synopsis of the transcripts.

#### ***4.7 Validity and Reliability***

One of the main requirements throughout any research process is ensuring that all data and findings are reliable. In research, validity refers to the integrity or suitability of the research methods used, while reliability refers to the possible duplication and consistency of the methodology used (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight three common threats to validity in qualitative research, that is researcher bias, reactivity, and respondent bias. Researcher bias relates to any aspect which induces bias in the researcher's documentation of responses. In order to eliminate the likelihood of this bias, the researcher considered any similarities that she has with the participant and recognised the impact that they may have on the research process (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Reactivity refers to any response from participants to research interventions which

could affect the dependability of the data. For instance, participants providing responses to paint themselves in a certain light rather than answering truthfully (Gibb, 2011). The researcher reduced the probability of this through a sound research design and iterative questioning (Shenton, 2004). Respondent bias is associated with any factor which induces and instigates a dishonest response (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The researcher recognised from the outset that establishing a level of trustworthiness with the interview participants would improve the data collection and analysis processes, thus ensuring validity. The researcher developed this trust by conducting the research in a private environment, through Microsoft Teams, allowing participants to feel safe to answer freely. In addition to this, permitting participants to withdraw from participating in the research also increased validity as it ensured that participants were willingly providing their insights. Additionally, to increase reliability and validity of data following each interview the researcher compiled a detailed record of the date, time, background information of the candidate and also the researcher's thoughts on how the interview went (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Ensuring reliability in qualitative research is challenging as it is unlikely that if the research was repeated, in the same environment, with the same methodology and the same participants that the exact same results could be achieved. Shenton (2004) suggests that the research design be regarded as a "prototype model" and that processes should be described in detail to allow a future researcher to repeat the work. However the process may not necessarily achieve the exact same findings. In order to achieve this standard of reliability or dependability the researcher utilised Microsoft Excel to document all the details of the research. This enabled the researcher to produce a succinct methodology section which details precisely what was planned and how it was performed.

#### ***4.8 Ethical Considerations***

When dealing with human participants, ethics must be considered at all stages of planning, designing, executing and analysing the research. Sanjari *et al.* (2014) detail the ethical challenges that qualitative research can present. These include ensuring anonymity, maintaining confidentiality, gaining consent, and remaining cognisant of researcher and participants potential impact on the results of the research. In addition to these challenges it is imperative to ensure compliance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). In

accordance with the European Unions (EU) guidelines (European Commission, 2013), the researcher took a number of precautions to ensure the research was being conducted ethically:

- The author sought consent from the Head of HR of the case study organisation. This request was granted (See Appendix P).
- A 'Human Participants Ethical Review Application Form' was submitted to the college in December at the proposal stage of the research (See Appendix Q).
- As mentioned previously the researcher emailed the prospective participants offering them the choice to take part in the research (Appendix B), reassuring the potential candidates that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
- Once the participants had confirmed their intention to participate in the study, the researcher, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, provided each participant with an information sheet (See Appendix F). This pamphlet provided transparency in terms of the nature of the research, the scope of the sample selected and the data collection, storage and encryption techniques.
- Prior to commencing any interviews, participants were issued with a participant consent form (See Appendix G) which also detailed the necessity to consent to the recording of the interview. These forms were signed electronically via AdobeSign and returned to the researcher. In addition to this, at the beginning of each interview the researcher reaffirmed the participants expressed consent to participate in and to the recording of the interview.
- Participant's identities were anonymised by removing any recognizable information and replacing their names with a code.
- The interviews were conducted electronically over Microsoft Teams. The researcher utilised the built in recording and transcribing tool to transcribe the data and also documented some key notes (See Appendix I – N). The researcher then stored the contextual data and the audio recordings on a device separate to the device on which the transcriptions were stored. The researcher was the sole individual with access to the data and all files were encrypted with a password to ensure confidentiality.

## **4.9 Conclusion**

The researcher based the research methodology off Saunders *et al.* (2019) ‘research onion’. When determining the research design, the author took into consideration the research philosophy, approach, methodology, time available, and also the access to participants. The research question also largely influenced the decision. Considering into consideration the nature of the research question, a case study strategy was selected. This approach allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the interactions between a real time phenomenon and it’s naturally occurring context, through six semi-structured interviews, leading to the collection of rich, in-depth, empirical data (Yin, 2018). This data assisted the researcher in understanding the extent to which mothers working remotely in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland experience the ‘Maternal Wall’ and whether this impacts upon their career development or not. In line with Saunders *et al.* (2019) recommendation, the researcher then analysed the research using thematic analysis, taking into consideration the five primary research objectives. The next chapter will discuss the findings of the data in great detail.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

The following chapter details the findings from the data collected during the primary research stage of the study. First, the demographic profile of the participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews will be examined. Second, the findings from the interview will be presented. The researcher used thematic analysis to interpret the data and identified five main themes which correlate with the research objectives and address the primary research question. Finally this chapter will conclude with a comprehensive overview of the findings from the research.

### 4.2 Demographic of participants

Purposive sampling was utilised to select mothers, known to be at leadership level in different positions across the organisation. Table 1 outlines the demographic profile of the participants who took part in this research. Participants were selected from a range of different functions and divisions to provide a comprehensive overview of the experiences of mothers across the entire organisation. The next section of this chapter will explore the key themes identified from the findings of the interviews.

Table 1 Demographic of participants

Demographic of participants						
Participant	111	222	333	444	555	666
Age	35-39	40 - 44	35 - 39	40 - 44	40 - 44	40 - 44
Marital status	Married	Married	Single	Married	Married	Married
No. of children	2	2	1	1	1	4
Age(s) of children	13, 5	8, 4	11	8	11	9, 7, 5, 5
Role	Senior Manager	Head of Function	Head of Function	Senior Manager	Senior Manager	Business Partner

## 4.3 Findings

### 4.3.1 Theme 1: Work Environment

The general consensus amongst the participants was that, once they overcame the initial challenging period of working remotely during the pandemic that remote working has had an overwhelmingly positive impact on their working environment. The belief amongst participants is that gender and parental status have not played a role in affecting their working environment. Instead they detailed the elements of remote working which have positively influenced their environments:

**Participant 1:** *“I wouldn't be in any better position if I was in the office right now”*

**Participant 3:** *“Once I had all my equipment at home and you can do all the meetings on teams and you know it's been, it's been great actually. It's been brilliant!”*

**Participant 4:** *“Another point I'd like to make is that my office environment is actually better. I'm looking out into a field and not a car park! Before Covid I actually lost my desk and before that I lost my office.”*

**Participant 5:** *“I see remote working remotely as a mother, as a positive... I honestly don't see a negative in it”*

In addition to this, from the findings it is apparent that the participant's working environment has not caused their productivity or performance to suffer and that they, and the business, have gained as a result of the shift to working environment:

**Participant 1:** *“My performance and productivity levels haven't dropped. I am working much more efficiently... if I was to review my performance it's definitely at a higher level”*

**Participant 3:** *“I think I have gained hugely on a personal level. And the business has not suffered in any way... It's a win/win. Everybody is happy.”*

**Participant 6:** *“I think it has honestly changed the lives of so many women, you know? Without impacting the business that is.”*

However, on the other hand, although Participant 2 could describe many positive attributes of working remotely as a mother, she does feel that remote working has been harder on mothers than fathers:

**Participant 2:** *“I think mothers found it much harder to work from home than fathers... I still find it difficult at times to find a quiet place to work uninterrupted, whereas the kids don’t interrupt their father as much.”*

Participant 2 raises an important point, in relation to the importance of appropriate childcare when working remotely. Likewise, four other participants detailed the criticality of sufficient childcare when working remotely:

**Participant 1:** *“I think what could prevent mothers from progressing is trying to do both. Like you can't have a Teams meeting and be trying to mind your kids as well, like, this is where the problem is, right?”*

**Participant 4:** *“Proper childcare is just so important.”*

**Participant 5:** *“I think remote working will be hugely beneficial to future mothers, provided they have sufficient childcare.”*

**Participant 6:** *“I think that once you have childcare in place it should be exactly the same”*

From the analysis it is clear that once there is adequate childcare in place that remote working can have a largely positive impact on the working environment of mothers. The researcher has identified four sub-theories to support this theme.

#### ***4.3.1.1 Sub-Theme 1: Trust***

As detailed in the literature review, trust between a manager and a remote employee is critical in ensuring a good working environment which empowers employees to perform better and enhance their career development opportunities (Solis, 2017). From the analysis it is evident that the participants have developed a level of trust with their managers, whereby they did not feel like they were being micromanaged or constantly watched:

**Participant 2:** *“We trusted people to do their jobs over the last 24 months”.*

**Participant 3:** *“We were trusted to act and trusted to do the job right. And you know, there's nobody breathing down your neck because people know you're going to get the job done”.*

**Participant 5:** *“It is all about the trust.”*

**Participant 6:** *“We are now trusted to act which enables women and mothers to get the job done.”*

#### **4.3.1.2 Sub Theme 2: Focus**

A common benefit detailed by the participants in relation to their working environment was their increased ability to focus when working remotely. The general consensus amongst the participants was that working remotely enables them the flexibility and space to focus and work to the best of their abilities:

**Participant 1:** *“I can focus much more on my professional duties during working hours and my domestic duties outside of that time. I suppose, remote working has really enabled me to do this.”*

**Participant 4:** *“I just want to reiterate that remote working has given me more flexibility to focus on my work.”*

**Participant 6:** *“I find that remote working is an ideal environment in which to really concentrate and focus on the work at hand.”*

Contrarily, as previously mentioned, Participant 2 does not feel as though working remotely affords her the opportunity to focus as she finds although she has an office her children interrupt her more than they do their father.

#### **4.3.1.3 Sub theme 3: Family Friendly**

All six participants detailed how remote working has led to a shift in the organisations culture, becoming a more family friendly environment. All six participants spoke at length about how remote working has provided them with the flexibility to be a better parent,

strengthening the connection they have with their children, thus creating a positive working environment for working mothers:

**Participant 1:** *“Say my daughter needs to go to the doctor... I can bring her, and I can then drop her back and come back to work and not feel like the worst parents in the world”*

**Participant 2:** *“ I'm used to interacting my children more. And I don't want to lose it. I don't want to lose that bond with my kids... You can do work more effectively working from home”*

**Participant 5:** *“I think being able to take this time with my son in the mornings or maybe after lunch does allow me to focus more and work to the best of my ability.”*

#### **4.3.1.4 Sub-them 4: Reduced Stress**

When asked about their working environment prior to the pandemic, the majority of the participants detailed a negative experience. This can be largely attributed to the stress associated with constantly being on the go, exhaustion, lack of sleep and long commutes to and from work. For instance Participant 1 described her experience of commuting from Kilkenny:

**Participant 1:** *“So, my day would start at 4:15am when I would get up and start to get ready. I would then get the kids out of bed at around 5:15/5:20am, get them dressed and ready to go. I would then pack up the car, drop them to their childminders at 5:30am and then go on ahead to Dublin. I travelled to Dublin every day with my husband, he would drive. So, then I suppose I would work for the day and then I would come home and work the whole way home in the car. We would then collect the kids at around 6:30pm”*

However, when asked how their working environment had changed since the shift to remote working, all participants agreed that remote working arrangements provide them with reduced stress and enhanced wellbeing which ultimately empowers them to perform better in their professional role:

**Participant 1:** *“It just really reduces the stress levels that were there before remote working”.*

**Participant 3:** *“I think for everyone's mental health remote working and all its benefits is really, really helpful”*

**Participant 4:** *“It's been amazing and I'm much calmer. I'm doing far more work and I know I'm far more productive. The stress is gone. The mad rat race has gone”*

**Participant 6:** *“Everyone is so much more relaxed and actually I think people attitudes towards work and life in general are so much more positive”.*

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Gender Roles**

In relation to the impact that remote working has on gender roles, four of the six participants felt that remote working has somewhat led to them undertaking a significant amount of additional domestic labour, or a “second shift” (Hochschild and Machung, 2012):

**Participant 2:** *“So yes 100% I think as a mother working remotely it has definitely reinforced the stereotype of mothers being perceived as primary caregivers while the fathers are busy at work”*

**Participant 3:** *“Moms were doing it all, working, being a mom, doing the home-schooling”*

**Participant 4:** *“The only thing is, I mean my husband is full time and I think it's uh probably just gender stereotypes but still assumes the washing will be done, the shopping will be done, and that tea will be on the table...I still have to remind my husband that yes, I am actually working. Even though I am working from home, I am still working.”*

Surprisingly, while these participants acknowledge that remote work may be facilitating them undertaking additional domestic duties the majority of participants do not feel that this is impacting upon their professional career:

**Participant 2:** *“I don't think it has impacted on my current career development”*

**Participant 4:** *“I don't think that its impacting upon my career but yes, those gender role or stereotype I suppose is definitely there. You know like the fathers are out earning all the money while the mother is still at home working but doing most of the house stuff”*

**Participant 6:** *“Do I feel like that has impacted my career? No, I don't think so”.*

Contrarily, the other two research participants feel that remote working has not contributed to the solidification of traditional gender roles. For instance, Participant 1 describes how she knows other mothers who have taken on the “burden of housework and minding kids” since

the shift to remote working. However, she details how the domestic duties in her house have always been divided between her and her husband since they had children in order to prevent the unequal distribution of work:

**Participant 1:** *“The relationship I have with my husband; he knew before we had kids that this was going to be a 50:50 thing... So, I think that's probably unusual for us to be able to split the domestic role or duties, but it is the way we've set it up from the start. So, I just wouldn't accept it any other way. So, they are his kids as much as mine and I actually do longer hours than him”.*

Similarly, Participant 5 states that remote working does not impact on the solidification of gender roles – *“I don't see remote working impacting on gender roles, well certainly not in my department or team. I don't. We don't see it”.* Instead, she describes a domestic environment in which the traditional gender roles have been reversed, as her husband assumes the more maternal responsibilities as has the primary caregiver, allowing her to focus on her professional duties:

**Participant 5:** *“It may not always be 50:50, he generally does more of the lions share, but it does allow me to find a suitable balance between my domestic and professional responsibilities”.*

While some of the participants found that remote working strengthened traditional gender roles, some participants stated that it provided them with a greater ability to balance their work-life balance and thus perform better in their professional role:

**Participant 1:** *“I don't know if you can hear it, but I have a tumble dryer on, the washing machine going on outside, and like it just takes that stress off the weekend of trying to do everything in those two days...So, I'm so pro working from home”*

**Participant 2:** *“You do have a better work life balance, definitely when you work remotely in comparison to, you know, sitting in the office... I don't want to compromise on that work life balance piece”.*

**Participant 5:** *“I think working remotely give us back more time too to spend on our duties in the home”*

### 4.3.3 Theme 3: Presenteeism

While the participants did not feel like remote working had impacted presenteeism so far, the participants raised concerns that presenteeism may impact them when the organisation begins to fully adopt a hybrid working arrangement:

**Participant 1:** *“I think what will be very interesting is when it goes back to hybrid and when some people are in, and some people are out”.*

**Participant 3:** *“Now if it turns into men in the office, women at home, I think that could present some challenges”*

**Participant 5:** *“I think it will be difficult initially with some people being in the office and others working from home... but I do think that although I will rely heavily on remote working that visibility will be a factor”.*

**Participant 6:** *“I am fearful of that concern surrounding presenteeism and what that could potentially mean for mothers... we will need to make sure that people are only going into the office for certain things rather than just going in the whole time to be seen and be present. I think we will lose people on the journey otherwise”.*

While Participant 2 felt that *“in reality, we are going to see a more male infused population actually in the office versus females working remotely”*, as a member of the management team she was confident that *“if we execute the hybrid working model effectively and if our business leaders lead by example, we shouldn’t see a return of that corporate presenteeism”*. From the findings it was apparent that the other participants are expecting the senior business leaders to lead by example to prevent a culture of presenteeism from developing:

**Participant 1:** *“I think it will be up to the senior leaders to lead by example and stick to our hybrid working guidelines. I think this will make it fair for everyone”*

**Participant 3:** *“It’s very much going to be about what the managing director does and what his view is. You know if he likes to see people five days a week, that’ll mean we will need to be in five days a week”.*

**Participant 6:** *“I also think there is a huge responsibility on the organisation as we move back into the workplace that we’re encouraging and making sure that we are showing leadership behaviours. What I mean by leadership behaviour is that we’re not reverting back*

*to presenteeism etc. whereby we could leave a generation, particularly young mothers, behind”.*

While the participants are cognisant of a corporate culture of presenteeism, they are not entirely opposed to going back to the office and have acknowledged that there is a need for some amount of in-person connection in the future. This occasional necessity to be physically in the office may be for purely for business purposes:

**Participant 5:** *“When somebody new comes in, or when somebody starts a new role or advances in their career, and they don’t have that opportunity to hang on the edge of somebody’s chair and just listen to what they’re talking about or go to every meeting with them physically and have the preamble on the way to a meeting and the preamble on the way back from a meeting to set context”*

**Participant 6:** *“I think people should only really be in the office when they absolutely need to be there. Uh for certain situations, and I’m talking about big meetings, collaboration, etc. But I think the day of going back into the office just to sit in the office is definitely gone, thankfully”.*

Or alternatively for more social or networking purposes:

**Participant 3:** *“There’s a definite benefit to seeing people in real life and seeing people face to face, and if we can just do it in a sort of a balanced way.”*

**Participant 4:** *“When you’re in the office, you can have the chat. You have it while making like coffee and you build that little relationship, like someone saying oh look at your dress today or don’t you look lovely? That is gone when it’s remote and it is very much back-to-back to back-to-back meetings”*

While the participants were satisfied that it may be necessary to be present in the office on certain occasions, they did highlight the potential consequences for the organisation if they were to facilitate a culture of presenteeism and remove mothers’ choice or flexibility:

**Participant 2:** *“In the future, I just want to have a choice... I want other people to understand that people will be working different patterns”*

**Participant 4:** *“Honestly, although I love my job and I have built some wonderful relationships, if we were to go back to being in the office fulltime or even 4 days a week, I would consider moving organisation”*

**Participant 6:** *“If employers try to take that flexibility away from working mothers it will lead to drastic consequences. So many mothers I know feel the same”*

#### **4.3.4 Theme 4: Career Development**

While the participants did acknowledge that certain barriers may pose a threat to their career development in the future i.e., a corporate culture of presenteeism, they did not agree with the view that remote working had detrimentally impacted their career development opportunities thus far. Instead, they spoke about the benefits that remote working has had on their own development:

**Participant 1:** *“I also have more time to dedicate to my own personal development which just wasn't there before.”*

**Participant 2:** *“Remote working has really enabled me to progress since March 2020.”*

**Participant 4:** *“I'm kind of thinking now I have got more opportunity... I'm kind of going, well, what's next for me?”*

In addition they detailed the benefits that remote working has on the professional development of mothers specifically:

**Participant 1:** *“If anything, being a mother working remotely there are more training and development opportunities... I don't think mothers are impacted adversely relative to men. If anything, even from a training perspective, it would open me to more training”*

**Participant 5:** *“We are being provided with more information more often and we are sharing information more freely, I don't think working remotely will have any negative impact on mother's career development.”*

**Participant 6:** *“I think that remote working may have the opposite impact. I think it'll be hugely beneficial to working mothers as career development opportunities arise as you know it will mean less time away from the family home.”*

In contrast, two of the participants did express concerns that being a mother working remotely may impact their promotional opportunities:

**Participant 2:** *“I think that if I am to be selected for another promotion, they will be considering my flexibility. Unconsciously, they will consider the fact that I have two kids. How mobile am I? How likely am I to change my geographical location? And how likely am I show up to show up to a meeting on the other end of the country?”*

**Participant 3:** *“Maybe they have ideas about me based on the fact that I worked for days and I'm a mother who knows, I'll never know.”*

However, the remaining participants were not in agreement and did not feel that being a mother working remotely had an impact on their promotional opportunities:

**Participant 1:** *“With remote working it definitely allows mothers to strive for those leadership positions because you already have more balance”*

**Participant 4:** *“I just want to reiterate that remote working has given me more flexibility to focus on my work. And I do think that played a huge part in enabling me to have 2 promotions in 2 years”*

**Participant 5:** *“I don't think being mother impacts your opportunities for promotion at all.”*

**Participant 6:** *“I think it would make me and other mothers more positively disposed to taking on a more senior role because there's not as much travel”.*

Another finding from the research is the impact that remote work has had on providing the participants with greater access to the people and resources they need to succeed. A reoccurring sentiment was that remote working has eradicated location as a barrier to their career progression. The enhanced access has enabled the participants to forge relationships with colleagues across the country, attend important meetings and apply for opportunities without needing to consider the location:

**Participant 1:** *“I've had access to people I wouldn't have had access to and been in meetings that I would never have been in because it's been remote”*

**Participant 2:** *“They will be able to deliver from any geographical location, at any time. I have proven this at least.”*

**Participant 4:** *“Like they asked me to take this over 2 years ago and I was like, no, not doing it. Because they wanted me to be in the office 5 days and as a mum, I just cannot do that. So I turned it down. Now that it's come up again I took the opportunity. It's not that I did the*

*promotion for the money, I had to do the promotion to suit me. Now it's acceptable that I don't have to be physically in the office the whole time to manage the team"*

**Participant 5:** *"I wouldn't have been as open to new challenges or even new locations before moving to remote working... The fact that we can now apply for a role within the business and be based anywhere in Ireland has opened many doors"*.

**Participant 6:** *"The most recent role I've taken up is an all-Ireland role which simply would not have been possible beforehand"*.

#### **4.3.5 Theme 5: Maternal Wall**

Initially when questioned on their experience of encountering the "Maternal Wall" the majority of the participants strongly opposed the suggestion that the phenomenon is present or that remote working has any impact on contributing to its pervalence:

**Participant 1:** *"In terms of me as a mother missing out on opportunities because I am working remotely? Absolutely not like. Yeah, just no."*

**Participant 2:** *"I haven't found anything like this to be fair over the last 24 months, I think everybody has normalized the idea of having children and working remotely"*

**Participant 3:** *"I just don't think those kinds of sinister unacceptable behaviours are present."*

**Participant 5:** *"But hmm, the maternal wall... It's certainly not something that I would have seen or witnessed"*

However, as the researcher probed the participants further, evidence began to emerge that suggested that perhaps remote working is contributing to the pervasiveness of the "Maternal Wall". For instance it appears that some of the participants have paid the price of the "Motherhood Penalty" as a result of being a mother working remotely:

**Participant 2:** *"I do also think that some managers expect us as mothers working remotely to underdeliver. They think we as mothers wouldn't have the same dedication in their eyes as a working father."*

**Participant 3:** *“Maybe there are people saying, “Oh well, you know, she's only on four days, she works from home, she won't want to go back full time, so I don't really think she's hungry enough for it” you know?”*

**Participant 5:** *“I don't believe that it is the same for a father who's working out of the home, then it is for a mother. I do think that a father would potentially progress in those few years ahead of a mother and therefore if you're looking at peer to peer, you know whether it's age group or you're starting at the same level in the company, you might just see those differences”.*

**Participant 6:** *“I do believe that the maternal wall is in place... I do think that remote working could impact how we perceive mothers”.*

In addition to the external presence of the “Maternal Wall”, a reoccurring theme throughout the findings was that as a result of their socio-cultural surroundings, it appears that some of the participants have been, or still are, limiting themselves because they are a mother:

**Participant 1:** *“As a mother, I know that I would only want to go one more level up... If anything, we have stigmatised ourselves if you get me?”*

**Participant 2:** *“Like in my own view I was holding back to have kids because of my career. For example, I was always worried about will people give me a chance to progress when I have a child or when I have a small child. Or you know, will they be reluctant to put more responsibility on me because I have a child and all this”*

**Participant 3:** *“It's less that the company wouldn't hire me because I'm a mother it's probably more that I may not apply for certain roles because I'm a mother”*

**Participant 5:** *“Because of my son, at present I am not particularly seeking a career advancement.”*

**Participant 6:** *“To be honest though I don't think I've ever been discriminated against since working remotely in fairness. What I do think is that I discriminates against myself”*

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight the key findings from the qualitative research. The researcher discussed the themes with respect to the five research objectives to better understand the extent to which remote working has contributed to the “Maternal Wall” at leadership level in the organisation since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In summary, while there is evidence to support the presence of the “Maternal Wall” at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland, it does not appear that remote working has actively contributed to the pervasiveness of the phenomena. Instead the thoughts and perspectives of participants painted an entirely different picture with all six participants detailing an overwhelming positive experience of remote working thus far which has enabled them to succeed as mothers and respected professionals. The next chapter will examine these findings in greater detail in accordance with the secondary research previously detailed in the literature review.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Considering the primary research question, the questions posed to the research participants were designed to obtain a greater understanding of the impact that remote work had on the professional development of mothers within the organisation. While the preliminary findings were presented in the previous chapter, this section will discuss the findings in unison with the research objectives and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

### **5.2 Objective 1: To investigate whether remote working has adversely effected woman with children's working environment in comparison to men with children.**

When initially asked to describe their experience of working remotely all six participants described how at the beginning of the pandemic they felt that that being a mother working remotely was having an adverse effect on their professional environment. These experiences are reflective of the findings from CSO (2020) statistic or Xiao *et al.* (2021) research. However, once they overcame the initially challenging period, the participants did not agree with the statement that women found it harder to work from home with their family around. The participants felt that once there is adequate childcare in place, remote working can have an overwhelmingly positive effect on them both personally and professionally. While the participants did not state that these positives were explicitly linked to being a mother, they did describe the advantages they posed to their environment in the context of being a working mother.

One of the many practical influences that remote work has had on the working environment of all six participants is the development of a greater trust between themselves and their managers. Findings from the literature detail the link between developing a greater sense of trust between managers and their subordinates and creating a good working environment with enhanced job performance and career development opportunities (Brower *et al.*, 2009). For instance one participant describes how liberating it feels to be trusted to do your job without being micromanaged by a dubious superior "*there's nobody breathing down your neck*

*because people know you're going to get the job done. And I think that's a nice feeling. You know that you are trusted, and you are empowered, and no one feels they have to see you five days a week to know you're doing a good job*". The psychological safety to know that mothers are trusted to do their job is key to maintaining a positive working environment in a remote setting (Solis, 2017).

An additional benefit that remote work has posed to the working environment of the participants is an enhanced ability to focus. Despite the literature suggesting that due to their maternal responsibilities, mothers working remotely may have a reduced capability to focus and meet the expectations of their employers (Masherini and Bidello 2020), the findings do not support this statement. The general consensus amongst the participants was that working remotely as a mother enables them the flexibility and space to focus and work to the best of their abilities. For example, one participant directly associated her ability to balance her domestic and professional duties with her increased ability to focus and ultimately with the two promotions she has received in the past two years *"I just want to reiterate that remote working has given me more flexibility to focus on my work. And I do think that played a huge part in enabling me to have two promotions in two years"*. These findings contradict Collins *et al.* (2020) theory that the recent shift to remote working has already led to mothers incurring a penalty as mothers have already made more professional sacrifices than men. In contrast they support Fuller and Hirsh (2019) and Ferrante (2018) who contend that the integration of work and family life through flexible arrangements can enable women to remain in their jobs in times of high family demand. Coincidentally, one of the primary reasons all six participants favoured a remote work environment is that it has supplemented a more family friendly environment.

Finally, a recent study by Clark *et al.* (2021) found that remote working conditions, as a results of Covid-19, have had a negative impact on the psychological and emotional wellbeing of Irish working mothers. While the participants did detail the challenges they faced initially in working from home and home-schooling, they agreed that remote working arrangements have significantly reduced stress levels and enhanced their overall wellbeing. The mothers illustrated their manic lifestyle prior to the pandemic and contrasted this against their current lifestyle. The participants were keen to demonstrate how this translates into their professional working environment, claiming that their ability to relax and be more mindful of their wellbeing has allowed them to become more efficient and productive. These findings

correlate with Sullivan (2012) and Sherman (2019) research who advocate that a remote working environment can improve wellbeing, reduce stress, and enhance job performance.

### ***5.3 Objective 2: To establish if mothers feel remote working arrangements contribute to the solidification of traditional gender roles?***

In light of the mass shift to remote work, there is a concern amongst researchers that gender stereotypes may pose a greater threat to working mothers than ever before (Chung *et al.*, 2021; Lufkin, 2021; Peck, 2021; Alon *et al.*, 2020; Chung and van der Lippe, 2018). This theory is based off of the fear that remote working could result in mothers taking on a greater share of domestic duties, conforming to traditional gender roles, and detrimentally impacting their career development opportunities. As previously discussed, considering men do not equally share the domestic caregiving responsibilities (CSO, 2021b; Russell *et al.*, 2019; Chung and van der Horst, 2018), womens career opportunities are at risk of becoming significantly compromised. Chung *et al.* (2021) research suggest that if women conform to these traditional gender roles, that they afford males more influence in the workplace, while depriving women of their professional sway, thus contributing to the presence of the “Maternal Wall”.

When considering whether remote working has contributed to the presence gender stereotypical assumptions five of the participants believe that it has – *“I think remote working has 100% reinforced gender stereotypes or roles, at least in my household ”*. Acker (1990) proposes that these stereotypical assumptions may be utilised to control and exclude women in the workplace. However, while gender stereotypes appear to be present, it does not seem as though they have transmitted into the workplace or have caused the devastating impact that the literature suggests. Instead, when questioned four of the participants were of the opinion that although they have taken on significantly more of the domestic duties – *“Moms were doing it all”* – the general consensus was that this “dual role” is not impacting upon their career development – *“I don’t think that its impacting upon my career but yes, those gender role or stereotype I suppose is definitely there”*. Contrary to the literature the participants detailed how working remotely has positively impacted the balance between their professional and domestic duties despite the presence of gender norms. While they are more likely to do household chores such as laundry or shopping when working remotely, they have

a greater autonomy to manage their work-life balance – *“You do have a better work life balance, definitely when you work remotely in comparison to, you know, sitting in the office”* which allows them more time and focus to succeed in their role. This finding correlates to those from ter Hoeven and van Zoonen’s (2015), Sullivan’s (2012) and Ferrante’s (2018) research.

The remaining two participants felt that remote working has not contributed to the solidification of gender roles – *“I don't see remote working impacting on gender roles, well certainly not in my department or team. I don't. We don't see it”*. Instead, both participants describe how remote working has essentially accelerated the reversal of traditional gender roles within their domestic setting. Remote working has allowed them to adopt the role of the primary bread winner, while the children’s father assumes more of the domestic duties – *“I’m also a little embarrassed to say this as a mother, but I actually put work before everything... I’m not the norm, and it's not right what I do. I suppose my husband would almost always take the more maternal, paternal, maternal role, so he's probably the better one to interview on this one”*. The second participant describes a similar scenario in which her husband does the *“lions share”* allowing her to *“find a suitable balance between my domestic and professional responsibilities”*. This finding contradicts the literature reviewed, particularly Eagly and Woods (2016) social role theory and poses an interesting question to future researchers – To what extent has remote working arrangements reversed traditional gender roles in society?

#### ***5.4 Objective 3: To investigate if remote working encourages a corporate culture of ‘presenteeism’ which detrimentally impacts mothers?***

As discussed in the literature review, there is a growing concern amongst researchers that the future of work in a remote environment may create a corporate culture of presenteeism which creates a risk of “invisibility” for women (Tomei, 2021). However, the general consensus amongst the participants is that thus far, remote working has not facilitated the development of a corporate culture of presenteeism as the vast majority have been working remotely. Additionally, the participants have attributed this *“level playing field”* to the conscientious efforts made by senior management to ensure that all colleagues are treated equally whether they are working remotely or physically in the office – *“I think that's something that the*

*management team are very aware of and are kind of warning us against presenteeism and people being there just to be there*". As previously discussed, colleagues have been trusted to do their jobs to the best of their ability, regardless of their location.

While the participants have not experienced a culture of presenteeism so far, all six participants voiced their concern that presenteeism could become an issue when the organisation fully embraces a hybrid working arrangement. Rubery and Tavora (2020) made the point that remote working could create new forms of gender segregation. The fear is that men may be more susceptible to spending more time in the office networking, learning, engaging, and innovating granting them greater access to business information and more efficient technologies. Meanwhile, mothers as the primary caregivers may be more inclined to work remotely and thus will be penalized as they will have restricted access to business resources and information – *"Now if it turns into men in the office, women at home, I think that could present some challenges and it could, it could negatively affect the number of women in leadership positions"*. As discussed in the literature this could lead to proximity bias creeping in and in an industry already dominated by males in decision making environments (CSO, 2021a) this could have a devastating impact on mothers as it creates a risk of proximity bias trickling into the workplace.

In terms of inhibiting a toxic culture of presenteeism from seeping into the business there are a number of precautions which the organisation must take. For instance, while the participants have identified the necessity for some in-person meetings in the future these meetings must be organised only when necessary – *"I think people should only really be in the office when they absolutely need to be there. Uh for certain situations, and I'm talking about big meetings, collaboration, etc."*. Furthermore, it is clear from the analysis that senior management will be responsible for setting the bar in terms of what is expected from colleagues – *"You know if he likes to see people five days a week, that'll mean we will need to be in five days a week"*. In order to prevent the development of a corporate culture of presenteeism which favours the "ideal worker" (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015), senior management will need to lead by example and abide by the hybrid guidelines – *"If our business leaders lead by example, we shouldn't see a return of that corporate presenteeism"*. In addition to leading by example, senior leadership must be careful not to appear to remove the element of choice. For example, a recent global survey found that by removing a mother's access to remote working opportunities, they were more likely to leave their job (Van Bommel, 2021). The participants echoed this sentiment – *"If employers try to take that*

*flexibility away from working mothers it will lead to drastic consequences. So many mothers I know feel the same".* Therefore, if senior leaders fail to execute the hybrid working model effectively, the organisation and the mothers impacted could experience significantly negative ramifications.

#### **5.5 Objective 4: To explore the impact that remote working is having on women with children's attitudes towards their own training, development, and promotion opportunities?**

Research by Chung and van der Lippe (2018) and Anderson (2021) proposes that remote working will have a detrimental impact on the career development of women, particularly mothers, relative to men. When considering the impact that remote work has had on their professional development, all the participants disagreed with these findings. While the participants did acknowledge that certain barriers may pose a threat to their career development in the future, that is that hybrid working could lead to a corporate culture of presenteeism, they did not agree with the view that remote working had detrimentally impacted their training and development opportunities thus far. In stark contrast to the literature, the participants spoke of the overwhelmingly positive impact that remote working has had on their career development as mothers – *"If anything, being a mother working remotely there are more training and development opportunities"*.

Kalleber and Reskin (1995) and Eagly and Karau (2002) research concludes that due to the presence of the maternal wall and maternal prejudice, mothers received fewer promotions than their male counterparts. When questioned on the impact that they believe remote working has had on their promotional opportunities the participants views were divided. Two of the participants articulated concerns that as a mother working remotely they may be subject negative competence assumptions, prejudice or proximity bias based on their parental status – *"I think that if I am to be selected for another promotion, they will be considering my flexibility. Unconsciously, they will consider the fact that I have two kids.* The views expressed by the remaining four participants however do not correlate with Kalleber and Reskin (1995) or Eagly and Karau (2002) research. They believe that there are in fact more opportunities for promotion for mothers who work remotely *"With remote working it*

*definitely allows mothers to strive for those leadership positions because you already have more balance”.*

The conflicting social roles of male and females, and the interpretations that they prompt, results in the formulation of gender stereotypes which can negatively impact upon the career development opportunities of women (Koenig and Eagly, 2014). A fundamental element in removing these stereotypes and promoting gender equality in the workplace is ensuring that both men and women have equivalent access to resources and opportunities. While this may be seen as a positive for all colleagues within the organisation it is of particular importance to working mothers as before their maternal duties often restricted their access. From the transcripts it is evident that remote working has enhanced the participants access, thus providing them with greater training, development, and promotional opportunities. All six participants detailed how a remote working environment has provided them with greater access to people, meetings, courses, new challenges, and roles within the organisation. For instance, from the analysis it is clear that remote working has eradicated work location as a barrier to career progression for working mothers – *“I’ve had access to people I wouldn’t have had access to and been in meetings that I would never have been in because it’s been remote”*. In contrast to the literature, the participants feel their visibility and access has been enhanced which has enabled the participants to forge relationships with key stakeholders and attend meetings across the island of Ireland which would not have been possible prior to the shift to remote working arrangements. It goes without saying this can have a hugely positive impact on the career development of mothers.

#### ***5.6 Objective 5: To ascertain whether the remote working conditions have enhanced the pervasiveness of the ‘Maternal Wall’ in the wholesale and retail industry?***

The final research objective aims to explore the impact that remote working explicitly has had on the pervasiveness of “Maternal Wall” in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. As previously discussed, it is evident that the “Maternal Wall” is impacting upon the career development of woman in the wholesale and retail industry as mothers still remain drastically underrepresented at leadership level in the industry CSO (2021a).

Recent research by Collins *et al.* (2020) asserts that remote working has directly enhanced the pervasiveness of this phenomenon. When questioned on their experience of encountering the

“Maternal Wall” whilst working remotely, the majority strongly opposed this suggestion – *“In terms of me as a mother missing out on opportunities because I am working remotely? Absolutely”*. The majority of participants agreed that while remote working has enhanced gender stereotyping and solidified traditional gender norms, that this is not necessarily related to remote working, that this culture was present prior to working remotely. Instead, the participants described how the move to remote working has had the reverse effect, forcing the organisational culture to change, and become more family friendly. The participants detailed the immensely positive impact that they felt remote working has had on their professional development. These benefits included a better working environment, built upon trust, which allowed them to focus better, spend more time with their family and achieve a greater work life balance. Notably, the participants illustrated how they felt that remote working had levelled the playing field and opened doors for mothers within the industry due to the increased access to people, information, and opportunities.

However when questioned further, the participants responses began to expose findings similar to those detailed in Collins *et al.* (2020) research which suggested that the recent shift to remote working has already led to mothers incurring the “Motherhood Penalty”. For instance, one participant described an experience in which she feels her manager is judging her based upon her gender and parental status – *“I do also think that some managers expect us as mothers working remotely to underdeliver. They think we as mothers wouldn't have the same dedication in their eyes as a working father”*. Gender stereotypes, when combined with parenthood, can polarize judgements of women and men such that mothers are held to a higher standard than fathers, as motherhood is assumed to reduce efficiency and lower performance (Williams, 2004). Similarly, another participant discussed the possibility that she may not be considered for a promotion due to the fact that she is a mother working remotely – *“Maybe there are people saying, “Oh well, you know, she's only on four days, she works from home, she won't want to go back full time, so I don't really think she's hungry enough for it” you know?”*. This form of prejudice is founded upon Eagly and Karau (2002) role congruity theory which posits that women perceived as the less favourable option for a leadership role when compared with their male counterparts due to their maternal responsibilities. Acker (1990) ascertains that this form of gender stereotyping can be utilised to control, exclude and penalize women in the workplace, drastically impacting upon their career development opportunities. While remote working has had many positive influences

over the developmental opportunities of mothers working remotely, based upon those two experiences it appears that remote work may enhance the pervasiveness.

## ***Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendations***

### ***6.1 Introduction***

The following chapter summarizes the main findings, draws comparisons with the research aims and objectives set out in *Chapter 1* and the overall conclusions from the study are explained. Following on from this the practical and theoretical implications of the research are discussed. The author then provides recommendations that can be used to supplement the continued success of remote working arrangements while dismantling the presence of the metaphorical “Maternal Wall” in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. This chapter also proposes potential opportunities for further research. Finally the research will conclude with a personal learning statement to close out the chapter and the dissertation.

### ***6.2 Achievement of Research Aim and Objectives***

Women, and particularly mothers remain to be greatly underrepresented at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland, a phenomenon known as the “Maternal Wall”. There is a growing concern that remote working may amplify the presence of the “Maternal Wall” (Chung *et al.*, 2021; Lufkin, 2021; Peck, 2021; Alon *et al.*, 2020; Chung and van der Lippe, 2018). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which remote working has contributed to the ‘Maternal Wall’ at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland. In an attempt to answer the research question, the author formulated five research objectives.

First, the researcher aimed to investigate whether remote working has adversely effected woman with children’s working environment in comparison to men with children. This objective stemmed from the findings of Xiao *et al.* (2021) research and CSO (2020) statistics which found that mothers may find it more challenging to work from home due to their working environment. The findings from this study contradict these allegations as a mothers remote working environment was not found to contribute to the presence of the “Maternal Wall”. Instead the study found that remote work has had a beneficial impact on the working environment of mothers. Once there is an adequate childcare in place, a greater level of trust,

increased ability to focus and enhanced wellbeing were some of the major features of remote working which the participants felt contributed to the development of a favourable working environment. However, the positive effect that remote working has had on working environments does not explicitly impact mothers. While this objective aimed to provide a comparison with fathers, due to time constraints the author did not undertake qualitative research with working fathers. In order to come to a more definitive conclusion, future research should gather the thoughts and perspectives of mothers as well as those of fathers in order to compare the findings.

The next research objective aimed to explore whether mothers feel remote working arrangements have contributed to the solidification of traditional gender roles. The fear is that while working remotely mothers may undertake a greater share of the domestic duties (CSO, 2021b; Russell *et al.*, 2019; Chung and van der Horst, 2018) and that the inequal distribution of labour may afford males greater influence in the workplace. However, while the findings demonstrate that mothers do take on the “*lion’s share*” of the domestic work, the solidification of gender roles does not necessarily contribute to the presence of the “Maternal Wall”. For instance, while mothers may be using the time regained from commuting and the hustle and bustle of life pre-Covid to fulfil their domestic duties, this is not inhibiting them from succeeding in their professional career. Instead, it is apparent that remote working provides working mothers the opportunity to enjoy a greater work-life balance. Additionally, in contrast to Eagly and Woods (2016) social role theory, an interesting finding emerged which suggested that remote working may have contributed to the reversal of traditional gender roles. As discussed previously, a potential avenue for future research may consider probing this suggestion further by gathering the thoughts and perspectives of working fathers.

The third research objective aimed to investigate if remote working has encouraged a corporate culture of ‘presenteeism’ which detrimentally impacts mothers (Rubery and Tavora, 2020), thus contributing to the presence of the “Maternal Wall”. When designing the research question and objectives the author had anticipated that the research participants would have spent a considerable amount of time working in a hybrid working arrangement. However, as the waves of Covid kept on coming the return to office date was continuously pushed down the line. Therefore, considering most colleagues have spent the vast majority of time working from home, the general consensus is that thus far remote working has not facilitated the development of a corporate culture of presenteeism. Nevertheless, this is an important watch out for the future as there is a concern that presenteeism could become an

issue when the organisation fully embraces a hybrid working arrangement. In an industry already dominated by males in decision making environments (CSO, 2021a) this could have a devastating impact on mother's career development, consequently contributing to the presence of the "Maternal Wall".

The next research objective the author sought to explore was the impact that remote working is having on women with children's attitudes towards their own training, development, and promotion opportunities. The literature suggests that remote working will have a detrimental impact on the career development of women, particularly mothers, relative to men (Anderson, 2021; Chung and van der Lippe, 2018) and could enhance the existence of the "Maternal Wall". Interestingly, in contrast to the literature it is apparent from the research that remote working has provided working mothers with greater access to training, development, and promotional opportunities across the island of Ireland. In addition to this, remote working has granted mothers with greater visibility and access to people, meetings and challenges which would not have been as attainable prior to the shift to remote working. Thus challenging the connotation that remote working negatively impacts career development opportunities and gives rise to the "Maternal Wall".

The fifth and final research objective ultimately focuses on the crux of the research – To ascertain whether the remote working conditions have enhanced the pervasiveness of the 'Maternal Wall' in the wholesale and retail industry. From the above findings, one could argue that remote working has not significantly contributed to the presence of the "Maternal Wall", as it seems that remote working has been an overwhelmingly positive experience for the mothers involved in the research. However, if you scratch below the surface, there is evidence that remote working has led to mothers incurring the "Motherhood Penalty", for example, casual gender stereotyping, negative competence assumptions or maternal biases. If these kind of behaviours are allowed to go unchecked they can have a truly devastating impact on the career development of working mothers and can strengthen the presence of the "Maternal Wall" within the organisation. Thus, it is imperative that mothers, and all colleagues, are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve regardless of their gender or parental status.

### 6.3 *Limitations of Research Design*

The researcher identified a number of limitations in relation to the research design:

- The first limitation of this research is in relation to the research objectives set out at the beginning. The research participants were due to be working in a hybrid working arrangement. However, the return to office date kept getting pushed out. This resulted in some of the findings being based upon speculation for the future.
- The second limitation of the research was the adaptation of a deductive approach. The researcher is cognisant of the fact that she would be approaching the data with preconceived notions on what to expect from the participants (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). While this poses some limitations, it was deemed applicable as it enabled the author to develop a basic framework, connecting the existing literature on the ‘Maternal Wall’ with the main research question and objectives.
- The third limitation is in relation to the sample size of research participants. Due to time constraints the researcher was restricted in the number of people interviewed as part of the research. While the researcher conducted 6 in-depth interviews, in accordance with Saunders *et al.* (2019) recommendation, a larger sample of perhaps 8 – 10 participants would have yielded different results and more illuminating findings. Additionally, while the primary aim of the of the research is to gain the perspectives of working mothers, the researcher is of the opinion that gathering the thoughts and perspectives of working fathers could enable the researcher to analyse the data through an alternative lens.
- The fourth limitation of the study is that the validity of qualitative research may have been compromised due to respondent bias. Furthermore, the challenges that working mothers have faced over the past two years may impact the validity or accuracy of their responses. Likewise, granted the research is related to their current employer, participants may be prone to restricting their answers for fear of the audio recordings being released and their anonymity or confidentiality being compromised. In anticipation of respondent bias, the researcher made every effort possible to reassure participant of their continued anonymity.
- The fifth limitation of the study is in relation to the data collection technique. The researcher could have utilised more probing questions to challenge or explore the opinions shared by the research participants.

- The sixth and final limitation the researcher identified in this study is in relation to the methodological choice. The author feels that conducting a larger study through a mixed method approach would have enhanced the validity of the data while also providing highly informative insights.

#### ***6.4 Suggestions for Future Research***

- While this research has shown that remote working can contribute to the presence of the “Maternal Wall”, the body of literature based on this phenomenon would benefit from gathering the thoughts and perspectives of working fathers. Two particular focus areas could be on the effect remote working has had on their work environment and also the impact it has had on traditional gender roles. This would provide a more rounded view of the contribution that remote working makes to the pervasiveness of the “Maternal Wall” as it would be possible to compare and contrast the findings.
- Considering the majority of the workforce has been working entirely remotely for the past two years, an interesting area for further research would be to explore the future impact of hybrid working arrangements on corporate culture of presenteeism
- Based off the findings from this research it is apparent that gender roles have been inverted in some family situations. Thus, a potential topic for further research would be to investigate to what extent remote working arrangements have reversed traditional gender roles in society.
- Finally, while the penalties that mothers face such as gender stereotyping, negative competence assumptions, bias etc. are often inflicted upon them by their manager or peers, mothers can also often incur a penalty upon themselves. A reoccurring theme throughout the research was a presence of an internal “Maternal Wall” in which it appears that some of the mothers involved in the research have been, or still are, limiting themselves because they are a mother, acting as their own biggest impediment. This finding poses an interesting avenue for future research to examine the extent to which mothers themselves contribute to the prevalence of the “Maternal Wall”.

## 6.5 Recommendations and Implications of Findings

In addition to researching the areas suggested above, the researcher has a number of recommendations to assist in dismantling and inhibiting the pervasiveness of the “Maternal Wall” and level the playing field for both mothers and fathers in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland:

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Resource Required</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<b>1</b>	Regularly reviewing and refreshing the current anti-discriminatory policies	Guaranteed compliance with latest legislation. In addition, regularly reviewing the company anti-discrimination policy demonstrates an active zero tolerance approach to undesirable discriminatory behaviours in the workplace.	Policy & Legal COE	Company cost	1 Month
<b>2</b>	Train all colleagues on ‘Dignity and Respect at Work’ and ‘Unconscious Bias’ training.	By creating a dialogue around dignity and respect it provides colleagues with the tools and training needed to treat all their co-workers equally. By making colleagues aware of their internal biases it is more likely they will avoid acting on them. A combination of both trainings increases the likelihood of a more inclusive and accepting working environment.	Learning & Development COE External training provider	€12,500	2 Months
<b>3</b>	Examining the current hiring and promotional practices	This may decrease hiring and promotion bias that is associated with women of a certain age who may be deemed to not be as committed to their career and will be more unavailable.	Recruitment COE Reward Team	Company cost	1 Month
<b>4</b>	Equal family leave for mother and fathers	Challenges traditional gender norms and normalizes the paradigm that both men and women will be out of the office for periods of time to raise their children	Policy & Legal COE	€500,000+ annually	6 months
<b>5</b>	Review hybrid work guidelines	The continuous review of hybrid working guidelines will assist in the prevention of a corporate culture of presenteeism which values the “ideal worker”	HR Operations Team	Company cost	1 Month

## **6.6 Personal Learning Statement**

In order to complete my Masters in Human Resource Management it was a requirement to carry out research on a topic in the field of HR. While I covered many interesting thought-provoking subject areas over the course of the last two years I wanted to challenge myself to study an issue which we had not explored in detail. I chose to conduct my research on the extent to which Covid has impacted upon the presence of maternal biases in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. This topic has become very relevant as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic and begin to adapt to the working environment of the new normal.

To begin the dissertation I felt initially like I started out on a bad foot. I was disappointed with the result from my research proposal. The scope of the research area was much too broad and would have been unachievable in such a short time frame. At the first meeting with my supervisor Bronwyn McFarlane, I expressed this disappointment. We discussed what I was aiming to achieve and how I intended on doing so and the focus of my research became clearer. Retrospectively, considering all I have learned about undertaking research, I can now fully appreciate the feedback provided on my proposal.

I found the literature review to be the most challenging aspect of the research process. For instance, I struggled to find literature which specifically explored the “Maternal Wall” in the context of Ireland or the wholesale and retail industry. I spent a lot of time at the beginning of the research trying to find reputable sources. This was a challenge in itself as I struggled to maintain focused on the topic at hand. I often found myself distracted and reading research journals on studies which weren’t necessarily relevant to my chosen research area. This then led me to constantly second guess my research question and intentions and I considered changing my topic many times. The indecision caused me to procrastinate, wasting valuable time. If I were to complete this research again I would have spent more time analysing the availability of peer reviewed sources prior to commencing the research.

In contrast to my experience of conducting the literature review I wholeheartedly enjoyed every other aspect of the research, particularly conducting the interviews. I was lucky that given I work in an organisation in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland I didn’t find it challenging to find participants. I enjoyed each interview and found it empowering to listen to the thoughts and perspectives of 6 inspiring mothers and my biggest regret is that I didn’t leave myself more time to interview even more mothers. Furthermore, in hindsight,

corroborating the views of working fathers would have provided this research with a comparative dimension and thus provided more depth to my research conclusions. Given the opportunity to further my research, I would take the same research approach however I would increase the sample to include the thoughts and perspectives of fathers.

Overall, although I found it difficult over the past few weeks to strike a balance between my professional and academic responsibilities I did thoroughly enjoy researching this topic and am considering researching this issue further upon completion of my Masters. The entire research process, from submitting my research proposal to writing this personal reflection, has been an incredible learning experience. In addition to all that I have learned academically I feel I have developed many practical transferable skills e.g., problem solving, organisation, time management, communication etc. throughout this process. In addition, I have gained a whole new perspective on the challenges mothers face in their professional environments, which I hope will shape my leadership style in the future.

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## *Appendix A: Key Findings and Authors*

Below, the key findings and key authors on each topic have been compiled to provide an oversight of Chapter 2.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Finding</b>	<b>Authors</b>
Remote working in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>97% indicated a preference for some form of remote working arrangement in the future.</li> </ul>	McCarthy <i>et al.</i> (2021)
Employment rates in Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women are still less likely to be employed when compared with men</li> <li>Maternal employment rates have been steadily increasing</li> <li>Mothers are more likely to be employed the higher their level of education</li> </ul>	CSO (2022a)  OECD (2020)  Callaghan <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Benefits of remote working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive environmental impact, increased female labour participation, improved wellbeing, and enhanced productivity</li> <li>Remote working arrangements can reduce stress and enhance work-life balance as well as job performance</li> </ul>	Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (2019)  Sullivan (2012)
Glass Ceiling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While Ireland is moving in the right direction towards achieving gender equality in Ireland, a substantial gender gap still remains at leadership level.</li> <li>The metaphor, depicts the often-intangible barriers that prevent highly successful women from reaching the peak of their professional careers.</li> </ul>	United Nations Development Programme (2020)  (Boyd, 2008)

<p>‘Maternal Wall’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socially constructed barriers which impede the career progression of mothers in the workplace.</li> <li>• Prejudice towards mothers in the workplace typically begin at three points – when a mother becomes pregnant, when a mother has the baby, when a mother requests flexible working arrangement.</li> <li>• Despite the prevalence of a highly competent, educated working mothers, mothers remain to be drastically underrepresented</li> </ul>	<p>Williams and Seagal (2003)</p> <p>CSO (2021a)</p>
<p>Motherhood Penalty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers encounter systematic disadvantages in the workplace in comparison to men or women without children</li> <li>• Remote working has already incurred a penalty on working mothers</li> </ul>	<p>Waldfogel (1995)</p> <p>Budig and England (2001)</p> <p>Collins <i>et al.</i> (2020)</p> <p>Peck (2020)</p> <p>Clark <i>et al.</i> (2021)</p>
<p>Gender Stereotyping</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be extremely harmful, affording males more influence in the workplace while depriving women of their professional influence.</li> </ul>	<p>Bell (2017)</p> <p>Heilman and Okitomo (2008)</p> <p>Tabassum and Nayak (2021)</p> <p>Madsen <i>et al.</i> (2020)</p>
<p>Dual Burden</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women are limited by the traditional stereotype of women tending to be caregiver, while fathers are breadwinners.</li> <li>• Woman still assume majority of domestic duties.</li> </ul>	<p>Eagly and Wood (2016)</p> <p>Ciccio <i>et al.</i> (2020)</p> <p>Hochschild and Machung (2012)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This can lead to the ‘second shift’ of caregiving – remote working will detrimentally impact upon this.</li> </ul>	
Negative Competence Assumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motherhood is assumed to reduce efficiency and lower performance</li> <li>• Role congruity theory - women are perceived as the less favourable option due to their maternal responsibilities</li> </ul>	Williams (2004)  Eagly and Karau (2002)
Presenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remote working may lead to artificial siloes and cliques in which you end up with a two-tiered workforce.</li> <li>• Remote working could limit mothers access in comparison to men or women without kids</li> <li>• Distrust between a manager and a remote employee will ultimately result in decreased job performance and loss of career development opportunities.</li> </ul>	Lufkin (2021)  Tomei (2021)  Solis (2017)

## *Appendix B: Invitation to participate in research*

Dear Colleagues,

I am currently in my second year of completing a MA in HR Management and am looking for volunteers to take part in an interview as part of the research for my dissertation.

The purpose of the research is to analyse how the shift to remote working since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has affected working mothers in the wholesale and retail industry and whether this has had an impact on career development opportunities.

The interviews, which I would like to schedule for Monday 14<sup>th</sup> of March, will take a semi-structured approach and shouldn't take more than 45 minutes. Through the interview I am hoping to gather a better understanding of your thoughts and perspective on how remote working has impacted upon you as a mother, and whether you believe this has had any effect on your career development.

**This research is being undertaken entirely independently of [redacted] and your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings.**

If you would like to participate please suggest a time that suits you on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> of March between 2 – 5pm and I will schedule a Teams meeting. Alternatively, if the 14<sup>th</sup> of March is unsuitable I can arrange interviews on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> of March.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask, or give me a call on [redacted].

Thanks in advance 😊

Kind regards,  
Niamh Kennedy

### *Appendix C: Interview Questions – First Draft*

1. I would like to reiterate that this interview is entirely anonymous and that all records will be kept confidential and sound recordings destroyed following this research. Do you give consent to take part in this interview?
2. For the purpose of this research, a mother is defined as a woman in employment, with at least one child aged 0-14, who lives in the same household, inclusive of biological, step or adoptive children – can you confirm that you are a part of this demographic?
3. It looks like the future of work in Ireland will be based around remote working arrangements. As a working mother how does this make you feel?
4. At present women only account for 30% of senior executive roles in the wholesale and retail industry. This number is even smaller for mothers. Do you think that remote working could boost this figure?
5. Do you think, as a mother working remotely, that you have access to a working environment which allows you to perform at your best when compared with your male counterparts? E.g., Access to quiet work area, can work uninterrupted, access to business info etc.
6. Do you find it difficult as a mother working remotely to balance your domestic and professional responsibilities?
7. Do you feel that being a mother and working remotely has led to you missing out on training and development opportunities in comparison with other men with children?
8. Do you think that being a mother and working remotely has restricted your career opportunities when compared with men with children?
9. Do you think remote working will benefit men with children more so than women with children in any way?
10. Do you feel like you have ever been penalised as a mother for working remotely? E.g., pay cut, missing out on a cool project, explain motherhood penalty - If so, do you think this impacted on your work?
11. Have you ever experienced any stigma as a result of being a mother and working remotely? If so, do you think this impacted on your work?
12. Do you feel as though you have been held to a higher standard as a mother working remotely when compared with men with children? If so, do you think this impacted on your work?
13. Do you think remote working will contribute to a corporate culture of presenteeism? If so as a mother working remotely in the future do you think that you will be at a disadvantage for career development opportunities?
14. Do you think that remote working solidifies traditional gender roles? E.g., mother = caregiver, father = breadwinner. If so, do you think this is holding you back from progressing?

15. I'm sure you have heard of the glass ceiling - Have you heard of the 'Maternal Wall'?
16. Researchers are suggesting that remote working will contribute to the 'Maternal Wall' and may negatively impact upon the career development opportunities of working mothers – would you agree with this sentiment?
17. Have you experienced any form of bias, prejudice, or discrimination as a result of being a mother who works remotely?
18. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me in relation to your experience as a mother working remotely in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland?

*Appendix D: Interview Questions – Second Draft*

1. I would like to reiterate that this interview is entirely anonymous and that all records will be kept confidential and sound recordings destroyed following this research. Do you give consent to take part in this interview?
2. For the purpose of this research, a mother is defined as a woman in employment, with at least one child aged 0-14, who lives in the same household, inclusive of biological, step or adoptive children – can you confirm that you are a part of this demographic?
3. As a working mother how do you feel about remote working?
4. While maternal employment rates are steadily rising, mothers remain to be greatly underrepresented at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. At present women only account for 30% of senior executive roles in the wholesale and retail industry. This number is even smaller for mothers. How do you think remote working could impact this percentage?
5. Do you think, as a mother working remotely, that you have access to a working environment which allows you to perform at your best when compared with working fathers? E.g., Access to quiet work area, can work uninterrupted, access to business info etc. – if not why do you think this is the case?
6. As a mother, how has working remotely impacted your ability to balance your domestic and professional responsibilities?
7. Do you think that there are differences in opportunities for training and development for mothers who work remotely in comparison to men who have children? Why do you think that is the case?
8. Does working remotely place more restrictions on career opportunities for fathers or mothers in your opinion? Can you explain why you think that is the case?
9. Does working remotely provide more benefit's for working mothers or fathers in your view? Why do you think that?
10. Have you heard of the motherhood penalty? How has this theory impacted your work?
11. Have you ever experienced any stigma as a result of being a mother and working remotely? If so, do you think this impacted on your work?

12. Do you feel as though you have been held to a higher standard as a mother working remotely when compared with men with children? If so, do you think this impacted on your work?
13. Do you think remote working will contribute to a corporate culture of presenteeism? If so how will a corporate culture of presenteeism impact your opportunities for career development?
14. Do you think that remote working solidifies traditional gender roles? E.g., mother = caregiver, father = breadwinner. If so, do you think this is preventing you from developing in your career?
15. What is your understanding of the term 'Maternal Wall'? Can you explain your experience of encountering the 'Maternal Wall'? How do you think remote working has impacted that?
16. Researchers are suggesting that remote working will contribute to the 'Maternal Wall' and may negatively impact upon the career development opportunities of working mothers –what are your thoughts on this sentiment?
17. Can you describe an experience of bias, prejudice, or discrimination as a result of being a mother who works remotely?
18. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me in relation to your experience as a mother working remotely in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland?

**Appendix E: Semi Structured Interview Matrix**

<b>Research Objective</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Theme</b>	<b>Literature</b>	<b>Question</b>
<b>1. To investigate the effect working remotely has on woman with children’s working environment in comparison to men with children.</b>	<b>Work environment</b>	<i>Past working environment</i>	CSO (2022b) statistics demonstrate that only 23% of the Irish workforce had worked remotely at some stage prior to the Covid 19 pandemic.	Can you briefly describe your experience of working remotely prior to the Covid-19 pandemic?
		<i>Present environment</i>	By the end of 2020, more than one in four people employed in the wholesale and retail industry were working remotely (CSO, 2022b), or approximately 70,000 employees (Ibec, 2020).	How has your experience changed since March 2020?
		<i>Future environment</i>	Results from McCarthy <i>et al.</i> (2021) found that 97% of wholesale and retail industry indicated a preference for some form of remote working arrangement in the future.	What would you like your working arrangement to look like in the future?
		<i>Retention</i>	A global survey found that mothers are 32% less likely to leave their job if they have access to remote working opportunities (Van Bommel, 2021)	A recent survey found that mothers are less likely to leave their job if they have access to remote working arrangements - Can you explain why you think that is the case?
		<i>Access</i>	Due to their additional workloads and disruptions in the home, women may appear not to be as “present” as their male counterparts (Alon <i>et al.</i> , 2020) which can result in reduced focus and ability to meet expectations (Masherini and Bisello, 2020).	Do you, as a mother working remotely, have access to a working environment which allows you to work to the best of your ability? If not why do you think this is the case?  How do you feel your working environment compares to that of working fathers? Why do you think this is?

		<i>Remote working challenges</i>	A higher percentage of females find it more difficult to work from home with family around than men (CSO, 2020).	Recent CSO statistics suggest that women found it harder to work from home than men during the pandemic - What are your thoughts on this sentiment?
<b>2. To ascertain whether the remote working conditions have enhanced the pervasiveness of the “Maternal Wall” in the wholesale and retail industry?</b>	<b>‘Maternal Wall’</b>	<i>Glass ceiling</i>	Bias or discrimination towards women in the workplace has been well documented in what is often described as the ‘glass ceiling’. . The metaphor depicts the often-intangible barriers that prevent highly successful women from reaching the peak of their professional careers (Boyd, 2008).	Mothers remain to be greatly underrepresented at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. At present women only account for 30% of senior executive roles in the wholesale and retail industry. This number is even smaller for mothers. How do you think remote working could impact this percentage?
		<i>Presence of ‘Maternal Wall’</i>	The term coined by Williams and Segal (2003) refers to the barriers that mothers face as they progress through their careers. Results from the Matrix Recruitment (2020) Workplace Equality Report found that 77% of participants felt that becoming a parent had had an impact on women’s career progression.	What is your understanding of the term ‘Maternal Wall’? Can you describe your experienced of encountering this this in your professional life since working remotely?
		<i>Presence of motherhood penalty</i>	Waldfogel (1995) and Budig and England (2001) argue that many mothers encounter a ‘motherhood penalty’ whereby they experience systematic disadvantages in the workplace in comparison to men or women without children.	Have you heard of the motherhood penalty? How has this theory impacted your work?
	<b>Motherhood Penalty</b>	<i>Role congruency</i>	Eagly and Karau (2002) role congruity theory, proposes that women are perceived as the less favourable option for a leadership role when compared with their male counterparts due to their maternal responsibilities.	Do you feel you have been treated differently, since working remotely, for engaging in behaviour which would typically be expected of a man? E.g., working later, accepting promotion etc - If so, why do you think is the case?

		<i>Standards</i>	Gender stereotypes, when combined with parenthood, can polarize judgements of women and men such that mothers are held to a higher standard than fathers as motherhood is assumed to reduce efficiency and lower performance (Williams, 2004).	Do you feel as though you have been held to a higher standard as a mother working remotely when compared with men with children? If so, why do you think this is and has this impacted on your work?
		<i>Negative competence assumptions</i>	Mothers can be considered to be less capable than an individual without children. The assumption is often based off the perception that mothers have a reduced work commitment and that they may unsettle normal working routine (Gatrell, 2011)	Can you describe an experience where a colleague or manager assumed that you were less capable, as a mother working remotely than a father? - If so, do you feel this has prohibited you from progressing in your career?
		<i>Bias</i>	Results from the Matrix Recruitment (2020) found that almost 60% of those surveyed said they feel that employers may hold an unconscious bias towards mothers. Williams and Segal (2003) suggest that maternal bias becomes apparent when a mother engages in a flexible working arrangement, such as working remotely.	Can you describe an experience of bias, prejudice, stigma, or discrimination as a result of being a mother who works remotely? If so, how did this impact upon your career? If not, can you explain why these aren't evident in the workplace?
		<i>Prejudice</i>	Eagly and Karau (2002) role congruity theory, proposes that the apparent discord between females and leadership roles leads to two types of prejudice. In this instance women are perceived as the less favourable option for a leadership role when compared with their male counterparts due to their maternal responsibilities.	Can you describe an experience of bias, prejudice, stigma, or discrimination as a result of being a mother who works remotely? If so, how did this impact upon your career? If not, can you explain why these aren't evident in the workplace?

		<i>Stigma</i>	The stigma associated with mothers working remotely can be detrimental to their career progression opportunities as it taints their image as an ‘ideal worker’ – someone who demonstrates an unyielding commitment to their job (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks, 2015).	Can you describe an experience of bias, prejudice, stigma, or discrimination as a result of being a mother who works remotely? If so, how did this impact upon your career? If not, can you explain why these aren’t evident in the workplace?
		<i>Discrimination</i>	Bornstein (2013) states that women are subjected to bias and discrimination in a patriarchal culture, which impacts upon their career development.	Can you describe an experience of bias, prejudice, stigma, or discrimination as a result of being a mother who works remotely? If so, how did this impact upon your career? If not, can you explain why these aren’t evident in the workplace?
<b>3. To establish if mother feel remote working arrangements contribute to the solidification of traditional gender roles?</b>	<b>Gender stereotyping</b>	<i>Cultural constraints on work life balance</i>	Women are more likely than men to experience the challenge of balancing their personal and professional lives (Chung and van der Horst, 2018). Women undertake the majority of domestic duties, spending on average 19.7 hours per week on care or household duties while men spend only 9.2 hours (Russell <i>et al.</i> , 2019).	Empirical evidence suggests that women spend twice as much time as men on domestic duties – How do you feel remote working has impacted your ability to balance your domestic and professional responsibilities?

		<i>Social Role Theory</i>	Eagly's (1987) social role theory posits that gender stereotypes are derived from the segregation of men and women in accordance with the differences and similarities in their roles within their society. Eagly and Wood (2016) and Ciccio <i>et al.</i> (2020) ascertain that parental status contributes to these stereotypes as historically mothers are perceived as the primary caregivers while men are viewed as the primary providers.	Do you think that remote working has reinforced traditional gender roles in the workplace? E.g., mother = caregiver, father = breadwinner. If so, do you think this is preventing you from developing in your career?
		<i>Impact</i>	Bell (2017), Heilman and Okitomo (2008), Tabassum and Nayak (2021) and Madsen <i>et al.</i> (2020) explore the implications that gender stereotypes have on women's career opportunities.	In addition to the penalties that mothers face, they often also experience significant barriers as a result of gender stereotypes. Can you describe an experience of stereotyping as a result of a mother who works remotely? How do you feel this impacted upon your work?
<b>4. To investigate if remote working encourage a corporate culture of 'presenteeism' which detrimentally impacts mothers?</b>	<b>Presenteeism</b>	<i>Visibility</i>	Tomei (2021) suggests that a remote working arrangement such as a hybrid working model creates a risk of 'invisibility' for women.	How do you feel remote working has impacted your visibility in the workplace when compared with colleagues who are fathers?
		<i>Two-tiered workforce</i>	Experts are warning that remote working may lead to artificial siloes and cliques in which you end up with a two-tiered workforce which treats men more favourably (Lufkin, 2021).	There is a growing concern amongst researchers that remote working may lead to a two-tiered workforce which benefit's men, obstructing the career development opportunities of mothers - What are your thoughts on this sentiment?

		<i>Impact</i>	The presence of more men in the physical office environment could ultimately increase gender inequality across the workforce by reinforcing traditional gender roles, obstructing women's career progression opportunities, many of which are positively correlated with in-person work (Lufkin, 2021)	Do you think remote working will contribute to a corporate culture of presenteeism which benefits fathers? If so, how does this impact your opportunities for career development?
<b>5. To explore the impact that remote working is having on women with children's attitudes towards their own training, development, and promotion opportunities?</b>	<b>Career Development</b>	<i>Remote working benefits</i>	There is a large body of research which focuses predominantly on the perceived benefits of remote working such as enhanced wellbeing, increased job performance and greater work life balance (Fuller and Hirsh, 2019; Sherman, 2019; Chung and van der Horst, 2018; Sullivan, 2012).	Can you describe some aspects of working remotely which you feel benefit your career development?
		<i>Remote working challenges</i>	A recent study by Collins <i>et al.</i> (2020) suggests that the recent shift to remote working has already led to mothers incurring a penalty as mothers have already made more professional sacrifices than men.	Contrarily, can you describe some of the obstacles that you face as a mother working remotely which hinder your career progression?
		<i>Training and development</i>	A recent study conducted by Anderson (2021) on behalf of IBEC also supports the theory that remote working arrangements have negatively impacted upon the career development opportunities of women, particularly mothers, relative to men.	Do you think that there are differences in opportunities for training and development for mothers who work remotely in comparison to men who have children? If so, why do you think that is the case?
		<i>Promotion</i>	Research suggests that women are often steered into downshifting their careers into positions of lower pay and promotion aspects as a result of becoming a mother (Gash, 2008; Kalleber and Reskin, 1995)	How do you feel being a mother impacts upon your chances of promotion? Does remote working impact this?

*Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet*

*An exploration of the extent to which remote working has contributed to the “Maternal Wall” at leadership level, in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland.*

Dear <<Colleague name>>,

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

**Who I am and what this study is about?**

I am currently in my second year of completing a MA in HR Management and am looking for volunteers to take part in an interview as part of the research for my dissertation. The purpose of the research is to analyse how the shift to remote working since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has affected working mothers in the wholesale and retail industry and whether this has had an impact on career development opportunities.

**What will be involved in taking part?**

Participating in this research will involve taking part in a semi-structured interview which will take approximately 45 minutes. Through the interview I am hoping to gather a better understanding of your thoughts and perspective on how remote working has impacted upon you as a mother, and whether you believe this has had any effect on your career development.

The topics which I intend on discussing include but are not limited to your working environment, the “Maternal Wall”, the “Motherhood Penalty”, traditional gender roles, corporate visibility, training and development opportunities, the benefits of remote working and also the challenges.

### **Why have you been invited to take part?**

You have been selected to take part in this study as the researcher aims to gain the perspective of working mothers from a diversity of teams within the organisation. For the purpose of this research a mother constitutes a woman in employment, with at least one child aged 0-14, who lives in the same household, inclusive of biological, step or adoptive children.

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

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you have the right to refuse to take part as well as withdraw from the research at any stage without facing any consequences.

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

There are no obvious physical or psychological risks involved with taking part in this research.

### **Will taking part be confidential?**

This research is being undertaken entirely independently of Musgrave and your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings.

### **How will information you provide be recorded, stored, and protected?**

The interviews will take place via Microsoft Teams and will be recorded and transcribed using the applications record and transcribe functionality. The Microsoft Teams interview recording will be retained purely for the purpose of transcribing data and will be deleted upon consent. In line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR all contextual data and the audio recordings will be stored on a device separate to the device on which the transcriptions will be stored. Furthermore, the researcher will be the sole individual with access to the data and all files will be encrypted with a password to ensure confidentiality.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

The results of this study will be used solely for the partial fulfilment of the requirements of my degree.

**Who should you contact for further information?**

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me, Niamh Kennedy, on my mobile 0851736376 or email [Niamh.kennedy@musgrave.ie](mailto:Niamh.kennedy@musgrave.ie).

Alternatively should you wish to speak with my dissertation supervisor, Bronwyn McFarlane, you may do so via phone 0000000000 or via email .

**Thank you in advance!** 😊

*Appendix G: Participant Consent Form*

*An exploration of the extent to which remote working has contributed to the “Maternal Wall” at leadership level, in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland.*

Consent to take part in research

- I \_\_\_\_\_ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves taking part in a semi-structured interview which will take approximately 45 minutes.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being recorded via Microsoft Teams.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the findings of the dissertation.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original recordings will be retained on the researcher’s laptop and encrypted with a password until the exams board confirm the results of the dissertation. Furthermore, the researcher will be the sole individual with access to the data and all files will be encrypted with a password to ensure confidentiality.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the

information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

Date:

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

Signature of researcher

Date:

## *Appendix H: Semi-structure Interview Guide*

Hi, as I detailed in the information pack, I am hoping to gather a better understanding of your thoughts and perspective on how remote working has impacted upon you as a mother, and whether you believe this has had any effect on your career development.

### **Opening Questions**

1. I would like to reiterate that this interview is entirely anonymous and that all records will be kept confidential and sound recordings destroyed following this research. Do you give consent to take part in this interview?
2. This interview is being recorded for the purpose of transcribing the data. All audio recordings will be destroyed following this research. Do you give consent to this interview being recorded?
3. For the purpose of this research, a mother is defined as a woman in employment, with at least one child aged 0-14, who lives in the same household, inclusive of biological, step or adoptive children – can you confirm that you are a part of this demographic?

### **Environment**

1. Can you briefly describe your experience of working remotely prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and how this has changed since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020?
2. A recent survey found that mothers are less likely to leave their job if they have access to remote working arrangements - Can you explain why you think that is the case?
3. What would you like your working arrangement to look like in the future?
4. Do you, as a mother working remotely, have access to a working environment which allows you to work to the best of your ability? If not why do you think this is the case?
5. Recent CSO statistics suggest that women found it harder to work from home than men during the pandemic - What are your thoughts on this sentiment?

### **‘Maternal Wall’/Motherhood penalty**

1. Mothers remain to be greatly underrepresented at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. At present women only account for 30% of senior executive roles in the wholesale and retail industry. This number is even smaller for mothers. How do you think remote working could impact this percentage?

2. What is your understanding of the term ‘Maternal Wall’?
3. Have you heard of the motherhood penalty? How has this theory impacted your work?
4. Do you feel you have been treated differently, since working remotely, for engaging in behaviour which would typically be expected of a man? E.g., working later, accepting promotion etc - If so, why do you think is the case?
5. Do you feel as though you have been held to a higher standard as a mother working remotely when compared with men with children? If so, why do you think this is and has this impacted on your work?
6. Can you describe an experience where a colleague or manager assumed that you were less capable, as a mother working remotely than a father? - If so, do you feel this has prohibited you from progressing in your career?
7. Can you describe an experience of bias, prejudice, stigma, or discrimination as a result of being a mother who works remotely? If so, how did this impact upon your career? If not, can you explain why these aren’t evident in the workplace?

### **Gender Stereotyping**

1. Empirical evidence suggests that women spend twice as much time as men on domestic duties – How do you feel remote working has impacted your ability to balance your domestic and professional responsibilities?
2. Do you think that remote working has reinforced traditional gender roles in the workplace? E.g., mother = caregiver, father = breadwinner. If so, do you think this is preventing you from developing in your career?
3. In addition to the penalties that mothers face, they often also experience significant barriers as a result of gender stereotypes. Can you describe an experience of stereotyping as a result of a mother who works remotely? E.g., colleague assuming as you were away from Teams that you were minding babies etc. How do you feel this impacted upon your work?

### **Presenteeism**

1. How do you feel remote working has impacted your visibility in the workplace when compared with colleagues who are fathers?
2. There is a growing concern amongst researchers that remote working may lead to a two-tiered workforce which benefits men, obstructing the career development opportunities of mothers - What are your thoughts on this sentiment?

3. Do you think remote working will contribute to a corporate culture of presenteeism which benefit's fathers? If so, how this impact your opportunities for career development?

### **Career Development**

1. Can you describe some aspects of working remotely which you feel benefit your career development?
2. Can you describe some of the obstacles that you face as a mother working remotely which hinder your career progression?
3. Do you think that there are differences in opportunities for training and development for mothers who work remotely in comparison to men who have children? If so, why do you think that is the case?
4. Does working remotely place more restrictions on career opportunities for fathers or mothers in your opinion? Can you explain why you think that is the case?
5. How do you feel being a mother impacts upon your chances of promotion? Does remote working impact this?

### **Closing Questions**

1. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me in relation to your experience as a mother working remotely in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland?
2. In order to ensure that I have captured your thoughts and perspectives accurately I would like to share the transcript with you for review – Are you happy to review the notes?

*Appendix I: Interview Transcript 111*

**Interviewer:** Thank you for consenting to take part in the study and also to consenting to the audio recording of this interview. One more question before we get started into it. For the purpose of this research a mother is defined as a woman in employment aged 15 to 64 with at least one child aged 0 to 14 living in the same household. Can you please confirm that you fall within that demographic?

**111:** Yes, I do.

**Interviewer:** OK so we will start with a couple of questions to gather an understanding of your general thoughts of working remotely as a mother. Can you briefly describe your experience of working remotely prior to the pandemic?

**111:** OK so uhm pre-pandemic. I had gone to four days working in Dublin and one day working from home. Before that I was commuting five days a week from Kilkenny. So, my day would start at 4:15am when I would get up and start to get ready. I would then get the kids out of bed at around 5:15/5:20am, get them dressed and ready to go. I would then pack up the car, drop them to their childminders at 5:30am and then go on ahead to Dublin. I travelled to Dublin every day with my husband, he would drive. So, then I suppose I would work for the day and then I would come home and work the whole way home in the car. We would then collect the kids at around 6:30pm – that is all things going well. Like what if there is a crash? There's crashes all time on the M7 and M9. We actually became experts in what ramps you go up and what ramps you go down to try and avoid accidents to get home on time as quickly as possible. At that like there were many days where it took at least 3-4 hours to get home at times. And that is just getting home, like that's not both ways. Like even getting up there, like you may have left in loads of time and normally I'd be at my desk at 7, but sometimes again there be a crash and we could be stuck, and it's that stress of I left in loads the time, but yet I'm going to be late!! You could be a couple of hours actually just sitting in traffic and it was just totally unproductive time. I'm and I think the other part of it was I didn't realize how tired I was, and I didn't realize the negative impact it was having on me at home, my health and also in my work. Now when I went to working from home on a Friday that actually had a positive impact because I was able to kind of structure my week that I kind of allowed that day for I suppose the kind of project work I had to work on. So, people weren't really disturbing me, which was great and because the rest of the week it was just constantly

having people, and it was all day, because when you are in the same office as your team, you're getting questions like all the time. You still do get that on teams, but it's like all the time, I mean trying to get something done in the office with everyone there. It was just next to impossible. So, I ended up having to do most of that at home after work. So collected the kids around 6 again working the whole way home. Um, get them in, get them fed, get whatever you had to get to get them ready for the next day and then just absolutely collapse. So, if you had to do more work, you do more work. But if not, you literally just collapsed. I would have to be in bed by 10:00 o'clock at night. For a lot of that time, my little one was very small as well. So, she was only a baby so she could be up 2/3 times at night as well. So best case scenario you were getting six hours but normally it was kind of 5 to 6 hours sleep but broken up. So yeah, I was going around like a zombie. Then every weekend it was getting ready. So obviously my other child would have sports as well. So, the weekends was usually some kind of sport on Saturday or Sunday. My husband would batch cook to get all the food ready for the week because you definitely just couldn't get that done during week. And I'd be trying to get loads of washing done. But trying to get them done or what washed and dried. I mean, I could have 10 loads of washing at a weekend. It's like, so it's just, it was so stressful. So, by the end, by like 6:00 o'clock on a Sunday evening, I just wanted to collapse. And was that constant cycle. I felt like I had no life, and I didn't even realize. I really had no life. I wasn't living. I was just existing, functioning and honestly, I had no quality of life.

**Interviewer:** How has your experience of remote working changed since the pandemic?

**111:** Yeah, so now I get at least 8 hours sleep in a night. I just didn't realize how sleep deprived I was until I was getting that level of sleep. And I need it. I'm not one of those genius people who doesn't need to sleep. I absolutely do. And I was adversely affected because I wasn't sleeping. It was affecting everything from my personal life right through into my professional life. So even I suppose with my kids I can drop them to the childminder. Working remotely allows me that flexibility. So, like I was just saying to before we went on record, it was 10:00 o'clock when I finished Friday night and it was 7:00 o'clock when I started Saturday morning. It was work that needed to be done. But you're OK doing that when you have that level of flexibility. Where, if I get a call from the childminder to say my daughter needs to go to the doctor, I don't need to ring my parents to bring my toddler to the doctor. I can bring her, and I can then drop her back and come back to work and not feel like the worst parents in the world. I can just feel slightly bad, and yes, I will feel guilty, but not the worst in the whole world. And it makes such a difference. Or, you know, with something

happens to be on and I, I don't know, even like going to the bank. So, like, uh, on a regular basis I don't take a lunch, but if I have to go to the bank to say pay somebody, at least I can do that. I couldn't do that before and I was trying to rely on other people, and there were certain things that other people couldn't do, and it was just really, really stressful. So, as a mother it's taken a lot of that stress off. I think it's really helped me to reevaluate my priorities, and I suppose that's probably a COVID/working from home thing. I even started training my sons sports club and I would never have gotten to even think of doing that. And so yeah, lots of things. So, I think it's just giving me more rounded life. I suppose to sum up my experience, personally I am less stressed, I spend more time with my family, I feel less guilty about working and I'm just enjoying my life and also being a mother more. Professionally, taking into consideration the benefit's I mentioned in my personal life, I am now not under so much pressure to always be go go go. Yet my performance and productivity levels haven't dropped. I am working much more efficiently, and I don't feel so burnt out all the time. I feel I have definitely gotten to a place where I have more balance in my life and I can focus much more on my professional duties during working hours and my domestic duties outside of that time. I suppose, remote working has really enabled me to do this.

**Interviewer:** And in terms of your career development then, how do you think remote working has impacted upon that?

**111:** Do you know what? It's funny. I would never have thought remote working could have enabled me to succeed or progress in my career because I always felt like I had to physically be there in the office to be seen and heard. But if I'm to look back and think on my performance, my performance since I've been working from home is much higher. I mean I would have done a lot of work in terms of personal development for career around stakeholder engagement, and all of that sort of stuff. But to be honest, I was failing miserably. Actually, in hindsight, looking back, there were a number of reasons. One of the reasons I was failing miserably was a kind of stressful situation in work. I was like a mental person, because that was ongoing, and it was really hard to deal with. But I would say another bigger factor, which also would have affected that other situation was that I was just so tired all of the time. I wasn't seeing clearly, and I was just so, why am I not like being understood, why are people not seeing me this way? And I was just so frazzled, I had this mental outlook on the world. Rather than just going, I'm just going to take a deep breath here and just take step back and take a moment. Like it was really stressful in the office too, when you had an issue with colleague and you're trying to, like, run out two corridor and it was just really not an

ideal situation. Whereas now I've had the happiest, nicest team and it's just been such a pleasure to work with. And I think that's because they're all feeling the effects of that level of flexibility that I was talking about. They all have upped their game, but they've all been really flexible in terms of if I need something done at 8, they'll do it, but then they have flexibility on their side. So, I think it's kind of helped everybody on my team and that in turn has helped me. But hey listen, I've not had a promotion ha-ha! But honestly if I was to review my performance it's definitely at a higher level. Am I working more? No. I'm not working more than I was in the last couple of years but now I'm working better and not even just more productively but at a higher level? I would say yes. A lot of that is to do with the reduction of stress.

**Interviewer:** Do you think, as a mother working remotely, that you have access to a working environment which allows you to perform at your best when compared with working fathers?

**111:** Yeah, I would think I do have the same access. Like I do think in terms of your access or your working environment, a lot of that you have to go get it. So, you know there has to be a bit of personal responsibility there as well. And you know it's different to the office in that there's nobody dropping stuff to your desk. To be honest, that sort of stuff just doesn't matter to me. In terms of the space at the moment I'm in my parents' garage. So, you know, it's absolutely fine. But I absolutely couldn't work with the kids around. I just couldn't do that. Like so even throughout the pandemic I had my daughter in childcare like she was the only one up there. But and I absolutely couldn't work is just two intense and every minute this is so important like your you have to be productive, otherwise he just won't get your job done. Also like the relationship I have with my husband; he knew before we had kids that this was going to be a 50:50 thing. We both are on similar levels of money. So, you know, we both pick up the slack. So, I think that's probably unusual for us to be able to split the domestic role or duties, but it is the way we've set it up from the start. So, I just wouldn't accept it any other way. So, they are his kids as much as mine and I actually do longer hours than him. So yeah, he just needs to pull his weight and in fairness to him he really does, which is really helpful to me. I think remote working has enabled that also like it has just given both of us back to much more time that we can spend minding our family but yet we are still able to do the best in our careers. Again, it just really reduces the stress levels that were there before remote working.

**Interviewer:** Recent statistics from the CSO and found that women found it harder than men to work from home. And what are your thoughts on that?

**111:** I suppose, working from home you're more inclined to do stuff like washing whatever. But to be honest, like really, we are supposed to be kind of working in 20-minute blocks anyway. So going out to a washing line for probably 5 minutes is actually probably beneficial. Even though you think you're losing time, it probably clears your head and so. For me I definitely wouldn't agree with that statement. And again, I think a lot of that is down to, and I genuinely think that this is not just me speculating here, this is me watching friends and relatives, women tend to have to take on the "burden" of housework and minding the kids. So, if it's all the drop offs and all that, whatever. So, I could totally understand that where that statistic is coming from, but I just don't let that happen in my house.

**Interviewer:** As a mother, what impact do you feel remote working will have on your visibility within the business?

**111:** To be honest it has increased my visibility within the business. Yeah, I probably have more visibility at a senior level and again I think that's back to the way I think my performance improved. I also think I have developed a huge level of trust. UM, so yeah, I've had more visibility. And also, I've had more visibility across the different divisions of the business. So, I've had access to people I wouldn't have had access to and being in meetings that I would never have been in because it's been remote. Those meetings are maybe being made a little bit wider? Uh, so yeah, definitely increased visibility. My take on this whole thing is that across our business there was always a mindset of oh that's Cork, that's Galway, that's Dublin, that's Belfast. Whereas when you're sitting wherever, that doesn't actually doesn't matter as much? Now because it's online I have greater accessibility to attend those all-important meetings which really are allowing me to succeed and perform and meet the business goals and my own personal objectives. Like the cross functionality across all the divisions is phenomenal. Like as a mother, I may not have been able to make important meetings in the different parts of the country because I would have needed to be home at a time to mind my children. I do think that remote working has removed that stigma, maybe I should call it self-inflicted stigma, but I just think now we are all working together as a team, and the more work we do together the stronger we become as a business. Remote working has really helped to take down those walls that once stood. It's really helped to feel like were working together and that we aren't segmented and siloed.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel being a mother impacts upon your chances of promotion and does remote working impact this?

**111:** So, speaking from personal experience, as a mother, I know that I would only want to go one more level up, ever. The reason for that is I wouldn't have a life outside of my work. And even to be honest, I would have slight reservations even. It kind of worries me a bit because I see how consumed my life is with the level that I'm at now. I think in our division in particular because there's so many, it's just so broad. Like realistically I am really enjoying where I am at the moment, and I just really feel I have such a happy work life balance I wouldn't like to jeopardise that. But to be honest, I think the next step for me is more specialization and you kind of have to take control of your own destiny, and that's probably part of this. I think often women make a decision, and look I get it, your kids are only young for so long. But if you want to go up the career ladder, you've got to really live for the business and that's the reality of it. Like it's not like I haven't taken calls at crazy hours or done things at crazy times, but sometimes you just go it's not really worth it is it? And yeah, I can see what you are trying to research like I do think maybe a man is less likely to make that decision. But I suppose I don't know. Maybe it's because of my own personal experience over the years and just burned out a few times and just going what's it for? You know, you could get cancer in the morning. What it for? You can only spend so much money. The tax man takes so much of it. Whereas perhaps, and this is totally my own perception, but perhaps that kind of alpha male thing kicks in where men want to be the top of the castle. To be honest I would have had that for a long time, and I think I'm now more at a stage where if I get a promotion it happens. I just want to be valued at the level that I'm at. But it's not the be all and the end all for me. And it was, for years! I had my first born at 25 and it's not just having a child. Like I did struggle with that for a long time because you know you're trying to work really long hours and you're trying to be a mother. And I think I was kind of failing miserably as a mother. And then I put more of a focus on it, and I just think, yeah, life is just too short. And yeah. Is it because I'm a woman? Is it because I'm a mother? Probably is, yeah.

**Interviewer:** And how do you feel remote working has impacted that?

**111:** I wouldn't be able to work as remotely it would be more hybrids. I would have to be on the road more like just say in the morning. And for me, no not happening! I would have to be doing more travel. So the level of remote working that I have now would not be possible. Like I do really think it's all about the balance. Like with remote working it definitely allows

mothers to strive for those leadership positions because you already have more balance. So, your less in that frazzled state because as a mother, you're an insane multitasker anyway, because you're like, you're basically running their little lives as well. All their activities, all their bits and pieces. Dealing with their crises and their struggles and whether they've gotten into trouble or whatever, and trying to sort all of that out and that's like, it's literally like having two jobs, right? That's like, it's like 2 jobs, right? So, it's your job that's very demanding and it's that job of being a mom. And when you're able to get 8 hours sleep and when you're able to, you know, run in and out to try and deal with those things. With remote working it just becomes so much more manageable, so you kind of go OK, well, do you know what I can do this, and I can have a better life and do this. And it is somehow manageable. But if it was back to that commuting thing, I couldn't do it. I just couldn't. I'm glad that we are planning on adopting a hybrid model. Because honestly, although I love my job and I have built some wonderful relationships, if we were to go back to being in the office fulltime or even 4 days a week, I would consider moving organisation. That's something I really don't want to do right now.

**Interviewer:** Earlier you mentioned removing stigma and taking down the walls that you feel once stood in the way of mothers. I suppose the next section I hope to discuss is essentially around the crux of the research, a phenomenon known as the 'Maternal Wall'. What is your understanding of that term?

**111:** Before you reached out to me to participate in the study, I had never heard it before. So, the use of the word walls was unintentional earlier, but it is most likely in my subconscious somehow ha ha!

**Interviewer:** So, as I explained in the information email, the 'Maternal Wall' relates to the systematic disadvantages that mothers face as they progress through their careers relative to non-mothers. These disadvantages may be classified as motherhood penalties, while the advantages that fathers experience may be referred to as the 'fatherhood premium'. Can you explain your experience of encountering the 'Maternal Wall' in the workplace?

**111:** Do you know what I actually can't? And the reason I can't is our situation is kind of flipped, so as I said, I'm the one who works late, and I'm the one who will get up at 5:00 AM work and you know, so I actually can't describe ever encountering that. I don't have that I have had a bad experience because I'm a mother other than any pressure or guilt that I have put on myself. The stigma I mentioned earlier like I don't think that is something that has

been put on mothers by men. If anything, we have stigmatised ourselves if you get me? I suppose if I look back to when I had my first baby, my husband and I had just started a business. He was working all the time, all these crazy hours and I felt like a single mother. I felt like he was never there, and I really was very resentful of that situation, very resentful. I hated it. But then when we didn't have the business anymore my husband changed his outlook on life just didn't want that whole craziness anymore. It like whatever about me, but I still had it in me that I wanted it, but he didn't want it at all. So, he was happy to get a good salary and just finish when he finished this. It's not that he doesn't try, like he really performs well at work, but I'm actually the one who does the longer hours and he's the one who's like oh for God's sake, will you come on? I miss lots of things because of work, and I suppose the penalty I face is guilt maybe? But I'm sure fathers feel that too. So yeah, I know the situation is probably flipped in our house, so I just don't really identify with that one. I know that's highly unusual. But I suppose are you asking about like bias towards mothers?

**Interviewer:** Yes, the 'Maternal Wall' is comprised of barriers such as bias, stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. Can you describe an experience of any of those in the workplace?

**111:** I assume you mean from my peers? No, absolutely not. I genuinely haven't experienced any of those types of negative behaviours. Yes, I have come up against some challenging people or behaviours in my career, but I don't feel they were in any way related to me being a mother. I do think that it's down to the wonderful culture we have within the organisation and our company values. That kind of treatment just wouldn't be tolerated. Also, in fairness to my manager, he is just so, so, so supportive. Now, as I said, he gets that back in bucket loads and I think that that's it's a mindset, right? So, when I looked to work from home on a Friday, first he was just not open to it at all. Like he was freaking out. And I was like, near breakdown, pure exhaustion. I was just doing too much trying to be the best in work and super mom at the same time. And I think in the end, that's why he ended up just giving in, because I had a few occasions where I just burst into tears. And really, I am not a crier so that probably scared him a bit. So, like when I cry, I'm at that point of exhaustion where I nearly need to take a week off and I had did have a couple of those and so I think it was kind of forced on him. So, then with the pandemic, and the shift to remote working, he realized the amount he was getting back from me and my team by giving this level of flexibility. And he has been incredible like, you know, I can just go and come back. I don't need to, even though I do, say anything to him. But he doesn't care because the ball has never dropped. You know, he just

sees things in terms of increased performance and wellbeing, and he has no reason to micromanage me or the team. We have built a huge level of trust. So, he has no reason hold any bias towards me as a mother or to treat me any differently, and he doesn't. But in fairness to an employer at the end of the day, or any boss, their job is to get the most efficiency possible out of their colleagues, right? So, if that's a woman who is only kind of half in and half out and dropping the ball because they want to spend more time with their kids. As an employer, that's bloody frustrating, right? So, there's nobody out there I don't think who minds giving a bit of flexibility, but as a boss you need to make sure try to get as much output as possible out of your people. That that sounds very cold, very calculating. But that's the reality. So, I think if you want that level of flexibility, you have to be giving it back. I'm actually can't believe I'm saying this, and I'm also a little embarrassed to say this as a mother, but I actually put work before everything. And I know that sounds horrendous. It genuinely does, but I won't let anything get in the way I suppose. Like, even if I have a child hanging out of me, I'll be on my phone and I'll be answering emails and God I'm actually genuinely embarrassed to say it. Perhaps that's why I haven't experienced the biases because I've almost been a man. I'm not the norm, and it's not right what I do. I suppose my husband would almost always take the more maternal, paternal, maternal role, so he's probably the better one to interview on this one. And it's awful, right? It is so awful, but I don't ever want to let somebody down, so I will pretty much always be there. I'm like, even, you know, it doesn't just because I'm a mother, like, everything at it sounds awful, but like I have literally, this is horrendous, but this was when my grandmother was dying. And I mean, like, literally had hours to live. And here I was bringing samples to another business. I've just always put work first and it's not right and it's horrible. But so, I'm probably an awful person for this. Uhm, I'd always give out to other people for being like this, you know, on my own team. Anytime they need any time, I say yes, of course. Yeah, no problem. Because I know I'll get it back in bucket loads and I know that they'll be happier. Which means they perform more. So perhaps it's a slightly selfish reason that I'm that way. Well, but I want to work with a happier, healthier team because I know that they'll perform more, and I know that I'll have an easier job if they're happy. But yeah, so I'm probably the weird outlier here, am I?

**Interviewer:** No, not at all it is very interesting to get your perspective.

**111:** Like I think what could prevent mothers from progressing is trying to do both. Like you can't have a Teams meeting and be trying to mind your kids as well, like, this is where the problem is, right? So, if you think you can do your job and also mind your kids, then as an

employer I would have an issue with you. Not if your child is sick, right. That's fair enough. And that's only the odd time and you can't send them to creche or whatever. But you can't just decide, that just because you're working from home now that you aren't paying childcare anymore. You know "I can do both". No, you can't. You absolutely can't. And you won't be able to do your job, and you absolutely will come up against bias, prejudice, stigma, the whole lot. Because your employer will still be paying you the same amount of money, but you will only be giving back half the amount of time. So, I think there has to be a sensible approach taken to it too and not just say it's all bias that, you know, there's practicalities to it as well.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that there are differences in opportunities for training and development for mothers who work remotely in comparison to men who have children? If so, why do you think that is the case?

**111:** Well, we kind of touched on it before we started recording around, you know you doing your masters and I'm I couldn't. I just couldn't. With two kids it just is not an option for me, and you know I did design thinking last year which I absolutely loved. But even the company agreed it was just in a ridiculous timeframe they actually doubled the time frame for the people this year because it was just crazy, but it nearly killed me like it was just too much and no. So, in terms of having that on top of my normal life and two kids, it just isn't a possibility. So, could that affect my career prospects and development? Yep, possibly. In terms of me as a mother missing out on opportunities because I am working remotely? Absolutely not like. Yeah, just no. I mean, even my boss rang me here on me on Friday to tell me that they are putting me on that manager training that I haven't wanted to go on for years. It may not be a promotion but it's very nice to be recognized to get onto that. And I know I would not have gotten onto that if I wasn't working remotely because I just wouldn't have been in the headspace to be even considered. If anything, being a mother working remotely there are more training and development opportunities. I also have more time to dedicate to my own personal development which just wasn't there before. Honestly though, back to your last question, there really has never been bias in this organisation in my experience. And do you know what, I can actually say I have been on meetings where they've gone beyond 5 whatever. And there have been mothers and fathers in the meeting or on the call who have said look I have to go get my child. Nobody has so much as blinked. Again, as I said it's a cultural thing within the organisation. It is acceptable to work at a high level and still fulfil your parental duties. Also, with the pandemic we released some working remote guidelines

whereby you know you can't contact people over lunch and before and after a certain hour or whatever. And yes, it does happen the odd time, but it is generally respected that you're entitled to log off at that time. Now you will still be expected to get your job done, but if you say you have to get your kids at that time, nobody, and this is with directors and everything on the call, nobody even blinks. It is trusted to act. I think that's been a huge one. But definitely no difference between men and women or mothers and fathers in terms of what I've seen either. I've seen men do that, and women do that, and nobody has looked. Now, if I was to say if I was to kind of be devil's advocate here and say that the same person was doing this every day or in every meeting I don't know if the attitude would be the same. But I have been on many calls where that's happened, and nobody has had an issue. But sorry this was a question on training and development. No, I don't think mothers are impacted adversely relative to men. If anything, even from a training perspective, it would open me to more training and the reason I say that is, and yeah, I don't like training remotely to be honest, but the option is there. So, if I wanted to do an online course, I could do an online course. Or if it was an IMI or whatever and I decided, right, I'm going to join that remotely. I could do that. So, it would be a possibility. Whereas driving up and down to Dublin to do training on top of work is not a possibility. And so, I suppose that stand out to me as I said is to have that flexibility or the choice, you know? It's then my choice that I go no. They can take me as I am if they want me to do training, that's fine. But I can't give the time to the travel.

**Interviewer:** Does working remotely provide more benefit's for working mothers or fathers in your view? Why do you think that?

**111:** Hmm, I can't say as a father as there aren't any fathers on my direct team. But I definitely, definitely, definitely think as a mother remote working has been a huge benefit to me. I don't know if you can hear it, but I have a tumble dryer on, the washing machine going on outside, and like it just takes that stress off the weekend of trying to do everything in those two days. For me personally anyway, so it just means that I have more time at the weekend to actually recuperate rather than this crazy cycle. So, I'm so pro working from home.

Uhm on even just as I said before, it just access to other parts of the business as well. It's just opened up so much because we don't have these walls around us.

**Interviewer:** Thanks for sharing some aspects of working remotely which you feel benefit your career development. Can you describe some of the obstacles that you face as a mother working remotely, which may hinder your career progression?

**111:** Em, no. And the reason I say that is, as I said it's not like I've gotten any promotion or anything. And it's not like there is one coming down the tracks for me, but you have to kind of take stuff like that into your own hands as well. Like there's other reasons for that too. So, I can't say that that has anything to do or not do with remote working, if you know what I mean. I've only seen the positive benefits. It doesn't work for I suppose kind of brainstorming and stuff like that. It doesn't really work for training in my opinion. But it does work for pretty much everything else. I know I wouldn't be in any better position if I was in the office right now. I think what will be very interesting is when it goes back to hybrid and when some people are in, and some people are out. But to be honest, the teams I guess the way it's been set up, the teams meeting is the heart of the meeting. So, you know whether you're in the room or in the room on a screen. I think it will be up to the senior leaders to lead by example and stick to our hybrid working guidelines. I think this will make it fair for everyone. Maybe down the line we might begin to see "oh she's never in that office". But when the meeting is set up that it's a Team's meeting and you're there remotely, I think that's enough. And once you're performing then as well. I think that's back to the crux of it. So once the performance doesn't wane, I don't think there's any issues or there's any worry about that in terms of development, for woman or for mothers. And I suppose the one thing about being a woman as well in a very male dominated environment is that men have different relationships with men than women have with men, and women have with women so, but that's not going to change, regardless of remote working. You know, they talk about different things. They might talk about soccer and whatever and that is what it is. There will always be that way. Like it just, I think I just never get my head stuck in that. Sorry I just don't think that remote working has anything to do with that. I just don't think that remote working will be a blocker to me forging important relationships. Yeah, I know what you're talking about in terms of visibility, but those relationships like, as I said, between men and women are different anyway. Like I'm never going to start a conversation with the managing director about golf because I have no interest in it. I'm not going to do that because I'm just not that type of person. So, whenever I talked to the MD, it's about something to do with work and I don't see any bias. And that won't change. So, you know even at the next big work event coming up, you know, I'm not going to go up and start having a big chat with him about some random stuff. He might say something to me about a project we're doing or whatever, and that's fine, but that won't change remote or at home. So that relationship is not like I'm going to be sitting down beside him and having a coffee. Like, it just won't happen. And there will be. Yes, I'm sure there will be some relationships built that I'm not able to build. But to be honest, I'm

really not that much of a corporate climber. I'm very much you take me based on what I produced and what I'm able to do in terms of bringing people together. And if you're not happy to promote me on that basis, then that's fine. I just have no interest in others stuff to be honest.

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much for your insight. Is there anything else you would like to share in relation to your experience as a mother working remotely?

**111:** No, I would just like to reiterate that it's just been wholly positive. So, like, look, I'm sure, and maybe again that's because I've gotten out of this headspace, that I have to get promoted. The world is going to end if I don't. I just think there's more to life. But yes, I am very lucky, I have a husband who is supportive and he's very good. He definitely takes more than his fair share of the burden and he'll continue to work remotely. But I think any woman who's in a situation who is at home all the time and the husband has gone back into the office. Yeah, I do think there's going to be a big shift. And I do think it's going to be very difficult for the woman and more difficult than ever, actually. But then you have just got to stand up to your partner, and even your colleagues if it comes down to it, I'm sorry.

*Appendix J: Interview Transcript 222*

**Interviewer:** Thank you for consenting to take part in the study and also to consenting to the audio recording of this interview. One more question before we get started into it. For the purpose of this research a mother is defined as a woman in employment aged 15 to 64 with at least one child aged 0 to 14 living in the same household. Can you please confirm that you fall within that demographic?

**222:** That's fine, yeah, I confirm.

**Interviewer:** OK so we will start with a couple of questions to gather an understanding of your general thoughts of working remotely as a mother. Can you briefly describe your experience of working remotely prior to the pandemic?

**222:** So, I hadn't worked remotely at all prior to pandemic I suppose, so I have no experience with that.

**Interviewer:** OK, can you describe your experience of remote working since the pandemic please?

**222:** In terms of my experience, I suppose when the pandemic started, so it had been, it had been initially very stressful, because I couldn't get my balance, right in terms of, I suppose you know me working from home and kids being at home and not having a minder initially because she didn't want to come and get COVID. Everybody was definitely in a state of a panic, so it was challenging for a few, I suppose the first one, two, three months, I suppose when the pandemic started in March 2020. But then I suppose over time when everything started to come back to normal and we got our minds, it was all kind of fine. And I think it was very stressful initially because none of us knew what's going to happen and we had to, you know, let people go on a short time or lay them off via teams. We had never used this technology before as much as we had to start using it and I suppose in March. So it was, it was stressful, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Can you explain to me your feelings towards working in a remote environment?

**222:** I 100% like working in a remote environment. Would I want to work fully remotely in the future? I don't know. I'm not sure. I love the kind of a random office interaction

sometimes, and I love having a team meeting face to face once in a while. Because I think it's needed. I think that the nature of our business is very much operational. So, we need to be seen among the operational colleagues as well. So, I don't think I could do my role fully remotely, but you could work fully remotely in any other role? Probably you could, but you know, I prefer to have a blended approach.

**Interviewer:** The findings from a recent IBEC survey found that mother working remotely are less likely to leave their job. Can you explain why do you think that that is the case?

**222:** This is totally understandable. We still have to fulfil a normal kind of role of whoever we are. And also we need to make sure that we do 3000 different things in addition to our professional life. As working mothers, we have so many different priorities. Because working remotely, we would have some sort of a flexibility to see our kids during the day, see them in the morning, drop them to school, potentially even collect them during lunch, over lunch break and stuff like this. So, you do have a better work life balance, definitely when you work remotely in comparison to, you know, sitting in the office. And for me personally I was spending time commuting. It was taking at least one hour each way. So, you know, like that's not, that's not a work life balance in any shape or form.

**Interviewer:** Do you, as a mother working remotely, have access to a working environment which allows you to work to the best of your ability in comparison with fathers?

**222:** Yeah, I think so. I think so. Like I have access to that what I need. But that is going to change when we work in a blended way because some people will be in the office and will be less accessible. But now working remotely, I have access to all the tools and resources and people, etc. So, I'm pretty happy with that yes.

**Interviewer:** Recent CSO statistics suggest that women found it harder to work from home than men during the pandemic - What are your thoughts on this sentiment?

**222:** I think it's totally different, I think mothers found it much harder to work from home than fathers. We had no child support initially. We all know that fathers do nothing don't we? Seriously, you know what I mean? So, and mothers do everything to be fair. Like obviously I'm speaking from my own standpoint. But I think all the jokes aside, I think that all the responsibilities usually fall on the mother. So, you know, even though whether you want it or not, majority of the of the things like getting the kids lunches, giving them breakfast in the morning, dressing them up at all. It's kind of you know, all falling on the mother. I suppose

maybe the father would be probably doing at a taxi job, namely picking them up sometimes or dropping them off to sports and stuff like this. So yeah. Initially we didn't know what's going to happen with people during pandemic. So, there was obviously a fear of losing my job as well initially on all of us I suppose. I basically had to work from my kitchen table, and I have been doing so for months. This is partially because I didn't have another place to work but also it was so I could keep an eye on the kids. You know I had to make sure that the kids are fed, and they are looked after while doing my actual work. Even though we have childcare now and I have an office upstairs I still find it difficult at times to find a quiet place to work uninterrupted, whereas the kids don't interrupt their father as much.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that remote working has reinforced traditional gender roles in the workplace? If so, do you think this is preventing you from developing in your career?

**222:** Well look. it's not easy. I think it has 100%, at least in my household. Obviously like if you were to ask the father of my children, he would say no. He would say wait a minute; I bring them to school sometimes. That's it really. So yes 100% I think as a mother working remotely it has definitely reinforced the stereotype of mothers being perceived as primary caregivers while the fathers are busy at work.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel this is impacting upon your career development?

**222:** I don't think it has impacted on my current career development. Will it impact my future career development? Yes, absolutely, because I'm used to working in a certain way now, I'm used to interacting my children more. And I don't want to lose it. I don't want to lose that bond with my kids. You know, I want to spend more time with my kids. I don't want to unnecessarily commute to work every single day. I think this was a waste of time. Like, you can do work more effectively working from home. So, if I am to have another job or whatever role I am going to do next, I don't want to compromise on that work life balance piece.

**Interviewer:** Can you explain please how working remotely has impacted your ability to balance your domestic and professional duties?

**222:** So initially I couldn't balance dash that because it was just a nightmare, you know? Like especially in my role, it is very full on, and our team was kind of emergency mode initially because we didn't know what's going to happen with those with the team, with people we're working with, teams we were supporting. So, it was really, really chaotic. So yes, like I

couldn't do nothing really. I wasn't able to find a balance at all. I had Domino's on speed dial, and you know what I still do, you know, and things like that. So, was I doing good as a mother? No. Was I doing good at work properly? No as well. For the same reason. So, it was challenging. Now? It's better because we have a full-time minder and she's collecting the kids and she's feeding them while we're working upstairs. Both of us. So, you know, it's not too bad. As I said my role is very full on, this is a very fast paced business and I need to be fully focused.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel being a mother impacts upon your chances of promotion and does remote working impact this?

**222:** I am lucky in that I received a promotion at the beginning of the pandemic to a more senior role. In saying that though, unfortunately women, and particularly mothers, are still very underrepresented at leadership level within this industry. I think that if I am to be selected for another promotion, they will be considering my flexibility. Unconsciously, they will consider the fact that I have two kids. How mobile am I? How likely am I to change my geographical location? And how likely am I show up to show up to a meeting on the other end of the country? I do think though that the mothers in this business have shown that given the flexibility they have the ability to achieve and fulfil their potential. This may not necessarily be within the standard 9-5 working hours but you know I don't think a mother shouldn't be considered for a promotion because we really have demonstrated that we are actually able to deliver while juggling the kids and the household and all of that craic. I don't think as mothers we had this opportunity pre pandemic so yes, I think remote working really positively impacts upon a mother's promotional opportunities. I know it certainly did for me. So, I think that we need to be brave and give people a choice, be able to give people a choice and say listen, you can work whatever hours you want. We know you're going to deliver so we trust you to do that. Also, they will be able to deliver from any geographical location, at any time. I have proven this at least. Before we were never able to do this it was very rigid. It was office based. You have to have the light on in your office until 6:00 PM. You know from 8am so everyone can know that you are working. This is complete nonsense. Like you're only productive property for I don't know five hours a day or something that you can fulfil your potential. And now we have talent that has emerged at kind of a senior management or not senior management but at the middle management level who are working mothers who we gave more flexibility to, and they were able to deliver. So, the reality is if you are part of the, I don't know management team or the board, the expectation is for you to be fully

flexible. Whether it's a location of work or whether it's working hours, times of the meetings and stuff like this. And it really depends on the leader of this particular team. I am very lucky because my boss wouldn't schedule meetings before 9:00 AM and he doesn't schedule meetings after half five and he wouldn't schedule meetings in the afternoon on a Friday. But that being said, there is leaders in our business who still do that, and it may not suit a working mother. So maybe this could be a watch out? But to answer your question I don't think being a mother would have a negative impact, I think it comes down to the individual's performance and attitude and also their managers leadership style. In terms of the impact that remote working may have in facilitating mothers to avail of these opportunities, it can only be positive in my opinion.

**Interviewer:** So, you kind of touched on visibility there with the craic with light being on in the office. As a mother, how do you think remote working will impact your visibility?

**222:** So, I think up until now yes, we have all been visible because we have been available all the time through Teams. Also, we have gotten used to peoples working hours. So, we knew some people may only be online until four because they are doing, I don't know kids' collection or kids drop off or whatever. Then they may go back online at 6:00 PM or something you know. So, I'm not too bothered by this. I think we have demonstrated the fact that we can deliver and that it doesn't have to be delivered between 9 to half 5. So, you know that's kind of the old concept that we should never go back to, but will it change in the blended world? It will. Because there will be people who will not want to commute and would prefer to work from home for whatever reasons I have mentioned. So, I don't know. You know to be fair, there is still a stigma on people, especially with smaller kids who have to do ABC and D, in terms of their own availability. Oh, and even when we when we talk about progression and stuff like this, we may assume a mother's availability or mobility. You know, which is obviously nonsense because this is the number one thing, we should remove from our thinking is this whole bias towards working mothers and just bias towards mothers in general assuming that they are not flexible because they have kids, you know? I'm not saying this is something that is evidently present in our organisation I'm just highlighting it as a watch out, that we should always be aware of our unconscious biases. And the same stands for everybody from the CEO right down to our operational colleagues. We must treat people fairly and always give equal opportunities.

**Interviewer:** So, speaking of, those stigmas and the bias you mentioned they are closely related to a phenomenon called the ‘Maternal Wall’. What is your understanding of this term?

**222:** Hm, I don't know. I think that's uh. Like in my own view I was holding back to have kids because of my career. For example, I was always worried about will people give me a chance to progress when I have a child or when I have a small child. Or you know, will they be reluctant to put more responsibility on me because I have a child and all this. So yes, it still exists 100% and like even we look at women across commercial roles like sales and stuff like this, there is very little of them because they are really demanding. I don't think the business is mature enough to be accommodating these guys and telling them actually can work you know like job sharing or you can work on rotation basis. Like we're still pretty rigid in terms of working hours and working days.

**Interviewer:** What impact do you think remote working will have on the presence of the ‘Maternal Wall’?

**222:** I think that we need to give people a choice and we need to trust them to do their job. We trusted people to do their jobs over the last 24 months, you know, so we were kind of looking at the output as opposed to the actual hours clocked. And this is the approach we need to continue going forward. Blended approach or not a blended approach. Like I'm not interested in if somebody is in the office or not. Or if I haven't seen them for a month. If they're happy with this arrangement and if they are delivering, I don't mind. I am lucky in that this is also the approach that my manager is taking with me. Back to your question, I think if do the hybrid model right, allowing mothers the flexibility and choice without disrupting business as usual, I think whatever element of bias and prejudice that is present will evaporate. I haven't found anything like this to be fair over the last 24 months, I think everybody has normalized the idea of having children and working remotely. So, I haven't really experienced anything like this, even though I had kids running in the background and I still do when I'm on calls and disturbing me and stuff. I just don't think people mind as much as they used to, you know. I feel like I haven't experienced this in the organization because I work only with men, and they would be pretty sensitive to the fact that I have kids. Sometimes, you know, I'm not able to do AB&C, but they don't say that. They kind of accommodate that. However, I have never shown them a lack of flexibility or lack of mobility and stuff like this, you know, so there's two sides to it. Like I just haven't experienced this. When I look at my own team, one thing that I think that that we shouldn't

assume, as like for everybody being a mother means a different thing. So, mothers are well able to judge their work and their work life, and you know, managed the kids and all these craic. Some people are not able to do it and they prefer to actually raise the kids themselves especially, you know in a remote working setting. But one thing I don't want us to do is kind of forget like we are supporting different customers in this business. It's not really about what I want, it's about what my customers want, and can they actually work with me, and can I work around them? If you get me. So, there's kind of two things to it.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel remote working has enabled you to meet those customer needs?

**222:** I think it has helped me, yeah, I think so, 100%. But it hasn't been the best at operational level. For that reason, that we were not face to face with these guys and you know, even having calls with other sites is different than actually going on to the site and having a coffee in an informal setting and talking tonight about the weather, you know or having a smoke with somebody in the shed where they're going to be confessing or something. You know, like we have lost that randomness and that is really important. And for HR that is really important. Even the open-door policy in HR, people just dropping by and having a chat, this is all so important for everyone.

**Interviewer:** We have already kind of touched on the reinforcement of gender roles, but could you maybe give me an example of a time when you were stereotyped as a result of being a mother? And how did this impact your development?

**222:** Oh yeah, 100%. I think I'm going to be a little vague here, and that's for a reason if that's OK? But yes, we thought about this when we looked at remote working initially and then also when we designed what the future hybrid model will look like. You know, remote working is not to swap for child minding, and this was said when I was the only person on the call who had kids, right? And I obviously felt that this remark was kind of directed towards me, whereas anybody who knows me knows that I'm flexible. You know that I never say no to go into certain location or being on call until 6:00 PM or something like this. So, I don't like stereotyping like this. And actually, I responded to this, and I said this is \*\*\*\*\* if we're assuming that people working remotely are only doing this to mind children as I could not work remotely and have my kids around me because I tried at the beginning of pandemic because I had no choice, and I failed. You know what I mean?

**Interviewer:** So, do you feel as though you have been held to a higher standard as a mother working remotely when compared with fathers? If so, do you think this impacted on your work?

**222:** Yeah, I think so. That availability wise, yes, because remote work with the technology that we use is assuming that you are always on. You know, online between whatever 9 to half five or something. And if somebody doesn't get you and you may still be available on teams or like, why aren't available, you know? So yes, and I think that this is a bit of a vicious circle because we kind of stretched ourselves, going from meetings to meetings. And now I have to deliver the same attitude that my male counterparts had. If you get me? So, I couldn't have declined the meeting when it was falling within a kids pick up time or something. If you get me because I felt that that's not a reasonable excuse to give, if you know what I mean? I really hope I'm making sense? But listen, like women are assumed to be less capable than man anyway, you know. So yes, I agree with whatever source or statistics your research is being driven from. 100% we are assumed to be less flexible, less mobile, less willing to dedicate ourselves to a job, you know, as opposed to the decade ourselves to family. I do also think that some managers expect us as mothers working remotely to underdeliver. They think we as mothers wouldn't have the same dedication in their eyes as a working father. And this has always been to do with those traditional gender roles we discussed earlier. You know what I mean? But no, I haven't experienced it first-hand. Like I've always delivered the best and I never said I couldn't do it because my child was sick. So, I haven't experienced this, no. However, if I look at my role from the point of view of the management team, I'm definitely perceived as less flexible because I'm a mother, you know, unless mobile and all this crap. So yeah. I do think that remote working will help to change this mindset though. Like in the past, I was never able to, when I had a different manager, I was not able to tell this person "Oh, I need to pop out for an hour" or I need to be offline for an hour because I need to make lunches for the kids. Whereas now I think it's normal and people respect this, you know? So that's really it.

**Interviewer:** Do you think remote working will contribute to a corporate culture of presenteeism? If so, how will a corporate culture of presenteeism impact your opportunities for career development?

**222:** As I said before, I think if we execute the hybrid working model effectively and if our business leaders lead by example, we shouldn't see a return of that corporate presenteeism

that we spoke about earlier. One thing I will certainly call out though is that in reality, we are going to see a more male infused population actually in the office versus females working remotely. So, there is a little bit of a fear of that that's going to happen because I know for sure that our best female talent, most of them mothers, works remotely, and they won't be able to commute to the office an hour and a half each way on a daily basis.

**Interviewer:** How do you think this will impact opportunities for career development for mothers?

**222:** I think this is a really key point you have raised and something that needs to be discussed at all levels within the organisation. How can we ensure that we don't revert to old ways of working as this could possibly benefit men over women? Like when I think of it, it's all about visibility when we talk about talent and progression, we always say "I see this person doing this", "I see them doing that" or "they're excellent", "I met them, and this is what they did". So, and again, this is all due to this bias as well as and everything else. That's really interesting.

**Interviewer:** How do you think remote working will impact training and development opportunities of mothers working remotely, relative to fathers?

**222:** There shouldn't be any difference. I believe there should be the same approach to training whether there is a face-to-face requirement for leadership training or a virtual training that is obviously more accessible to everybody. But at the end of the day, there will be people who won't be able to attend face to face. Leadership training sessions or some training sessions and probably majority of them will be mothers. But I don't want to think that. Training needs to be inclusive.

**Interviewer:** What would you like your working arrangement to look like in the future?

**222:** In the future, I just want to have a choice, I suppose, and I want other people to understand that people will be working different patterns. They will have different circumstances when we do work in a blend that approach, there will be more men in the office and that doesn't mean they're doing a better job just because they're outside nine to five or something, you know. I think that we need to be really open mind and remove all this bias we have had in the past. I hate this. It's all going to be down to leading from the top. So, depends on how the leaders will show up, including their approach, remote working, blended

work and dress code and everything like this like this will filter down to the rest of the teams. So, I'm very conscious of that.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything else that you would like to share with me in relation to your experience as a mother working remotely in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland?

**222:** We have probably covered everything, but I did just want to say remote working has really enabled me to progress since March 2020. I have that flexibility to work my own kind of hours and the fact that I didn't have to commute, and I saved myself an hour in the morning, I was able to login sometimes, then prep at 8 as opposed to being on the road already at half seven and the fact that I was able to access people very quickly via teams, so the technology enabled that. Uh, another like piece of a puzzle is that I've met people from different parts of the business because we worked on the same projects and again, this was technology enabled back in the days we would have to arrange a meeting for months and wants to meet in one location to actually get to know everybody. So, yeah. Positive impact only. It has allowed me to strengthen relationships with people across the island of Ireland and I would never have this ability in the real life. If you get me? I think that it recently it has been a positive experience because everybody is in the same boat. People are compassionate, they empathize. They understand people circumstances.

**Interviewer:** Thanks so much, that is wonderful thank you.

*Appendix K: Interview Transcript 333*

**Interviewer:** Thank you for consenting to take part in the study and also to consenting to the audio recording of this interview. One more question before we get started into it. For the purpose of this research a mother is defined as a woman in employment aged 15 to 64 with at least one child aged 0 to 14 living in the same household. Can you please confirm that you fall within that demographic?

**333:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Could you briefly describe your experience of working remotely prior to the pandemic?

**333:** Yes. Prior to the pandemic I didn't really do any remote working other than you know, very occasionally happened to log on to finish something or, you know, checking your emails on your phone or, you know, but pretty much my office setup was in the office. You know, my big monitor, my, you know my laptop. Like the laptop is fine, but I don't like to work on it for hours, really. I didn't really have an office setup at home because I don't have space to have a separate office. And so, it was much more limited. I was much more office based. I wasn't on the road like some people are or anything. I was very much in the office. You know, my office in Dublin? And I work four days a week, so I was there every day. So, the bulk of my work was really done in the office.

**Interviewer:** OK. How has your remote working experience changed since the pandemic?

**333:** Yeah it has completely changed because we went from being full time in the office to being full time at home. I had to set up with a proper, you know, create a space at a proper desk. I have my screen; I have my printer and at first, I actually found it quite difficult being at home. I think it was because of the circumstances, you know. The fact that you couldn't go more than two kilometres from your house, you couldn't see anyone. I found it quite isolating. But then when normal life returned. You know, I kind of settled into it then, and once I had all my equipment at home and you can do all the meetings on teams and you know it's been, it's been great actually. It's been. It's been brilliant, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I suppose in relation to that point you made that at the beginning you found it quite difficult; Recent CSO statistics suggest that women found it harder to work from home than men during the pandemic - What are your thoughts on this sentiment?

**333:** I think initially it was a challenge. That is probably because I'm also a single parent, so you know, and I have one son. So, you know it was the whole thing of him being not in school either. And work was really fraught at the time because we're so much change going on. It was very demanding and then we were trying to do home schooling. I actually forgot the timings of all the different things that happened, it was all a blur. I found that time quite full on though and I was very happy when the schools reopened. But then now that he's back at school and back at after school for me it's very easy to work from home. Because I am the only one at home, I have the whole house to myself. There's no disruption or noise or anything. But yeah, I would say it would be rougher for a mom because the home schooling and kids not being in school and all their activities and everything being cancelled, you're trying to manage another little person's disappointments. You know, as well as dealing with your own challenges basically. Now the plan is to be back in the office from April or something on a hybrid basis. Although that's been pushed out now a couple of times obviously for very good reason. So, I think you know that will be the plan. We're back in the office 50% of the time and I'm glad I'm going to have that mix. Because I think you can get actually very good work done at home, away from the office, and it particularly lends itself to kind of project work and stuff that requires lots of concentration. When you go into the office, you know everybody wants to have the chats with you really because people haven't seen you and this catching up and you're thinking I haven't time to have this conversation. But equally it's important for the team that you know, they see me, and I see them in in real life as well. So, I think it'll be a nice balance, to have the mix.

**Interviewer:** And as a mother working remotely, I know you mentioned that you didn't have an office initially, but do you feel as if you have access to a working environment which allows you to work to the best of your ability?

**333:** Yes, I do now because my son is back in school, and he goes to after school care. Sometimes he is with his dad you know? Some evenings. So, I have, there is nobody else in the house, only me. So it's great. You know, it's actually a very good set up and I still don't have a kind of a dedicated office like some people would have. That's really just down to the size of the house. But because I'm the only person in it, it probably matters less because in some houses there is, you know, 2 adults working from home. There's maybe a couple of kids. Pressure is really on the space. But for me it's fine. You hear stories of people working at the kitchen table or sharing an office space with their spouses and I don't know how they did this. There's lots of stories like that, even from people who worked with me. You know,

there at home with the kitchen table, their kids were at home with the kitchen table. Everyone around this table. And it's either that or work in your bedroom and people don't want to be in their bedroom because then you know you're there literally all day, you know. And that's just really nice and not good for anyone. It's not great for anyone's health to be in one room all day. So, and for me as well, I don't know if this is important to your study, but I have a good commute to work. So, like I live in Louth, and I work in Dublin, so you know in the morning it's probably 45 minutes to an hour on a good day. And you know and that's quite a lot of time in your day you know. So, working from home means I can drop my son to school, and I can still be at my desk, you know, nice and early. And at lunchtime you can, not that this happens very often, but in theory you can get out for 20 minutes or have your sandwich in the garden, you know? So, it's quite a nice environment. It's less fraught, you know it's a different kind of a setup. So, I don't miss the commuting for sure.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe what impact those benefits have had on your professional duties or your career?

**333:** I don't really feel that it's impacted them really in any negative way. I mean, I know I was for a lot of last year from January to June, I was involved in an awful project, really nightmarish stuff. I found it really hard going and I think there were times where had I been in the office, it would have been easier to stick my head into another colleague and just say like I'm having a nightmare or I'm having a really bad day dealing with this disaster or whatever. So, I think when times are very tough like that, you can feel quite isolated. And when you're working on something really difficult and challenging, but that was probably a unique kind of situation. I haven't felt that since. I'm quite lucky. I have good relationships built up. I'm working here a very long time. Must be hard for anyone new joining remote, you know, in a remote world. But for me? It's been. It's been fine. Yeah, it's been fine. After the first couple of times you present on teams, you kind of get over it, you know.

**Interviewer:** I suppose you kind of touched on the emotion of feeling isolation, how do you feel remote working has impacted your visibility when compared with your peers who are fathers?

**333:** You see, that's a tricky one, because everyone's been working remotely. And I can imagine, you know, if other people were in the office and you were at home, I yeah, I would say definitely your visibility would be impacted and there will be a danger of being forgotten about for sure. I think that is certainly something that the leaders within the business need to

be conscious of when we return to the office in a hybrid format. But I'm not naturally someone who's going to be kind of saying, look at me. I'm great. You know, I'm just pretty low-key person who does my job and gets on with it. But when you're in the office, you naturally see people, and that probably helps with your profile. And so, I don't think it has impacted me negatively just because everybody else has been working from home as well. I do think I was probably at a disadvantage during the home schooling. don't think other people would have had to deal with that. But that just made my life harder. It didn't affect my work; I don't think so anyway? Yeah. Homework had to get done.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel remote working has affected your ability to balance your domestic and your professional duties?

**333:** For sure better, because even like I say, even dropping my son to school, I could never do that, you know, and that's kind of that's a really lovely thing that you never get back, you know? So, and it's no negative impact to the company and it's a huge it's a huge thing for me. So, you know definitely that's made a huge difference. So, it's just that morning, you know, instead of him going to creche in the morning or my mum having to take him to school, I can do it and then he goes to after school and everything still. But it's just I have that time in the morning which makes a big difference for me. And then on a personal level, I suppose, you're less tired because you're not commuting for an hour and a half in the car, you know in total each day you're not coming kind of in frazzled, you know. Someday you even think it did I even see daylight today, you know. So, I think for everyone's mental health remote working and all its benefit's is really, really helpful. You know, even being here to take in a delivery or just small things that, you know, you can just nip out and maybe do during the week where you never would normally ever get through them until Saturday or whatever, it's it just gives you a lot more flexibility without impacting on the time you have to give to work, I think.

**Interviewer:** What is your understanding of the term 'Maternal Wall'?

**333:** So, I have heard of the motherhood penalty, we discussed it recently on one of our leadership discovery forums. It's similar to that isn't it?

**Interviewer:** Yes absolutely, so it basically refers to the obstacles or the systematic disadvantages that women in the workplace face as a result of being a mom. Could you describe an experience of encountering this?

**333:** From a work perspective, and this is no, this is nothing bad really to say about anybody but to be honest like during that difficult period where moms were doing it all, working, being a mom, doing the home-schooling, nobody in the organisation even acknowledged that this was happening. It's crazy when you think of it. You know, nobody, nobody even acknowledged. And I mean, I only have one and he's 10. But for people who have smaller children, you know. And people who have more than one. It must have been really difficult, but you know, I felt that that was just sort of this, this thing I had to kind of keep invisible. Nobody was telling me that, but that's just what I felt.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel as though you have been held to a higher standard as a mother working remotely when compared with men with children? If so, why do you think this is and has this impacted on your work?

**333:** No, I don't. I don't think I have just simply because from a work perspective, nobody really acknowledges the existence of children. You know well enough. Not a bad way, but you know, you're just expected to do it, and that's fine, you know, because it's everyone's personal choice to just, you know, to have children, not to have children, and you have to make it work. And you have to do your job because, you know, you have to pay your bills. So, I know I never felt, I've never felt penalized in any way. No, to be fair I really haven't. And but I mean, for obvious reasons, I don't really want to be a director in this organisation because I just know I couldn't give any more time because I have other commitments. But that's just the age-old men, women challenge, I think. I don't think it's anything new around the pandemic or the remote working. The remote working has definitely, I would say, maybe your research is already showing this, but it has definitely been a positive for mothers. Because, you know, they are more present in their own home while still ticking the boxes for work.

**Interviewer:** In addition to the penalties that mothers face, they often also experience significant barriers as a result of gender stereotypes. Can you describe an experience of stereotyping as a result of a mother who works remotely?

**333:** No, no, I don't, I don't think I have. Nothing that I can think of. No, no. It would probably be a bit worrying if I said yes, wouldn't it? I haven't really. And me and my boss haven't discussed in any detail, you know how I feel about remote working or what I want from the April onwards. I get the sense from my manager that he will work with whatever I

want to be to be fair to him. So no, no one's assuming that I wanted to be at home because I am a mother or anything, and I, which is good, yeah.

**Interviewer:** There is a growing concern amongst researchers that remote working may lead to a two-tiered workforce which benefit's men, obstructing the career development opportunities of mothers - What are your thoughts on this sentiment? Can you describe some of the obstacles that you face as a mother working remotely which hinder your career progression?

**333:** Yeah definitely, that's probably a risk. And then we could see the problems that you were talking about evolving. Again, to be fair I think that's something that the management team are very aware of and are kind of warning us against presenteeism and people being there just to be there, you know, so I don't know if that's something we're going to actively sort of police or we probably can't really, can we? You know, if somebody wants to be there five days a week, but yeah, you will have to be sure that it wasn't to someone else's detriment.

**Interviewer:** Just before we turned on to record, we were discussing the level of women and mothers at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland. As we said at present women only account for 30% of senior leadership roles. How do you think that remote working will impact that statistic?

**333:** Yeah, we're probably not unique. I mean, it's probably not unique to the wholesale and foodservice industry. The lack of women in leadership positions to be fair. You know it's pretty much across the board it's getting better, but slowly. Yeah, I think it's been a level playing field for the last two years because everyone's being at home, but now if it turns into men in the office, women at home, I think that could present some challenges and it could, it could negatively affect the number of women in leadership positions potentially which will obviously affect the number of mothers too. I think, unless companies are really sort of really strong about all meetings happening on teams, not encouraging presenteeism and you know, being very clear about kind of what good looks like in terms of how often we need to see our senior leaders in the office, you know. Maybe it's not five days. You know, a lot of it's going to be down to the culture of the organization, isn't it really? There's so many positives to this new way of working and I don't think anyone wants to go back to the old ways of working like. I even said to friend of mine recently that there's a wardrobe full of clothes and I am never going to wear again. I am not going back to high heels and dresses. I'm just not. I need to find some sort of smart casual alternative. Because why would I? You know when it's me.

I've been so comfortable at my desk now for the last two years. You know, and obviously I can't go into my sweats or whatever, but. You know, even that stuff needs to change now. I think this is kind of a watershed time to say you know, we need to, we need to realize what's important here about what people are doing at work. And it's not about what they wear or about how often they're in the office and just be kind of. And I mean most people are really trying to do that, you know, even look they are trying to make the office environment look different and investing and all that stuff is really positive. Because what they're saying is it's a different world now. You come to work to do different things and we don't expect you to be here five days a week because we've seen what you can do at home. So, I see it as very positive. Yeah, yeah. But just on a practical level, they'll be that whole what am I going to wear thing. We'll see. To flip the question of obstacles on its head and look at the benefit's like because remote working has given us so much flexibility and freedom, I think the question really is what challenges are you going to face going back to the office? You know, just on a practical level it's going to be about that different discipline in the morning. It's going to be about commuting to work. It's going to be again about, you know, putting arrangements in place in the morning. It's going to be about disruption for my son now because he's gotten used to a certain way, you know, which is obviously lovely for him. But none of it is insurmountable, you know, and I think about if I had to go back to doing it five days a week you could resent that because you could be thinking like, really? Why are you making us do this? Because what is the difference, you know and there's a definite benefit to seeing people in real life and seeing people face to face, and if we can just do it in a sort of a balanced way then it can work for everybody. But I suppose at the end of the day you know, people always have choices, you know, even mums have choices, and you know, you have to make difficult choices sometimes you know, but I don't know, I suppose. Does the company, is the company going to say to be a senior leader in this business we need you here five days a week for the full day? In which case you're looking at, you know, child-care from morning till night and not seeing your children and who wants to work for an organization like that? But I mean, I didn't really answer your question properly. I mean, I suppose the challenges for someone working remotely or really, you know like when you have to do home schooling, which please God would never happen again. That definitely affected mothers you know, to a greater degree, I would say, but again maybe that's my own situation. And then in, you know in holidays and stuff and kids are off school, your choice to go into the office then anyway. And you know if you've got childcare setup for the kids. So, I can't think of anything

really other than the home schooling which was, which was quite challenging. Yeah. Yeah, maybe there's something else I'm missing, but I can't think now.

**Interviewer:** So, you have mentioned some benefit's such as freedom, flexibility, and the removal of the daily commute. Can you describe some other aspects of working remotely which you feel benefit your career development?

**333:** Yeah. Well, I suppose it's just, you know, the trust that was there, you know, on the part of our employer. You know, it's very empowering as well. I mean, I'm in senior enough role anyway and I'd expect to be trusted, but uhm we were kind of left to get on with it. We were trusted to act and trusted to do the job right. And you know, there's nobody breathing down your neck because people know you're going to get the job done. And I think that's a nice feeling. You know that you are trusted, and you are empowered, and no one feels they have to see you five days a week to know you're doing a good job. And I think that's definitely a good thing. You know, when you're at home, when you're working remotely and every conversation takes an action on your part, because when you're in the office, there's a lot of water, cooler moments, and catchups in the kitchen. So, you have to be much more focused when you're working at home about making conversations happen and scheduling those calls and you can't just stick your head into someone's office to say, "hey, have you got a minute?". So, I think it makes you be more disciplined really with your time and we're actually getting stuff done, you know.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that there are differences in opportunities for training and development for mothers who work remotely in comparison to men who have children? If so, why do you think that is the case?

**333:** I mean no don't believe the organisation would discriminate if someone put themselves forward. But I know there are some jobs advertised in the business that are, you know, travel is required. And I don't know many mothers who could go for those kinds of roles that might have to stay away overnight and stuff. But maybe some people can do it? Maybe if they've got a supportive partner at home who's willing to, you know, pick up the pieces. But I don't believe, I mean I'd be very alarmed if I thought that people were being discriminated based on the fact that they were a working mother. I've not seen anything in my time in this business and thankfully not in any organisation that I have worked in. I just don't think those kinds of sinister unacceptable behaviours are present. However now that I think of it, I was

once asked by a boss what parental leave was! But those days are well and truly gone, aren't they?

**Interviewer:** Absolutely you would really hope those days are gone. In terms of that point you raised in relation to a mother perhaps being reluctant to take on a role due to the travel requirements. In your opinion what impact would remote working have on making that decision?

**333:** Well, I suppose if they could, if they could be at the site without traveling to the site via teams meeting, you know, if they could do training remotely, that kind of stuff and like there's some jobs in the organisation as well that will be different or difficult for mothers just because you are expected to always be on. You know, like even now I'm always on. I could get a phone call from a director on a Friday night at 9:00 o'clock you know, hey, there's a reason there aren't really many women in jobs like that because it's just so demanding. The work life balance would be really haywire and if you're trying to manage your family it will be very difficult. But that's probably just the nature of those jobs, isn't it, you know?

**Interviewer:** How do you feel being a mother impacts upon your chances of promotion? Does remote working impact this?

**333:** Well, not yet is probably the answer to the second part of that question. I suppose I haven't applied for any roles in the time I've been working from home. Again, as I said from April time will tell, you know, about this visibility piece and you know how important it really is in the minds of the managing director and the senior exec or whatever. Sorry, what was the first part of the question again please?

**Interviewer:** How do you feel being a mother impacts your promotional opportunities?

**333:** I suppose it's less that the company wouldn't hire me because my mother it's probably more that I may not apply for certain roles because I'm a mother. You know, as in I might think, you know what? I don't want that role. I don't want that director or whatever it might be because my work life balance is too important to me. You know, as it is, I work four days for the last, maybe five years. And that's hugely important to me. You know to have that balance even where you do 4 full on days, but then at least you have your Friday. So, I suppose that'll tell you about what's important to me in terms of work life balance. And I will be very reluctant to give that up. Because that has just been life changing for me, to be honest. And remote working has honestly only amplified those benefits. But I believe if I said

to the business, you know, I wanted to go back five days and I want to do that job. Then, sure they would believe me, and they wouldn't think, "oh, she's a mother". But maybe they have ideas about me based on the fact that I worked for days and I'm a mother who knows, I'll never know. You know, there's discussions that take place in boardrooms and people are evaluated and for succession and progression, you know, and maybe there are people saying "Oh well, you know, she's only on four days, she works from home, she won't want to go back full time, so I don't really think she's hungry enough for it" you know? I don't know. But being honest, I don't worry about that. To be a fly on the wall, I suppose. I'm probably better off not knowing. Maybe I'm already sort of flagged in some way with the other people who do three or four days because they're doing some kind of work life thing, and it may well be that I'm already marked? Like if you think about it in the context of this research, what about what mothers who already work part time? Are they completely kind of on some kind of blacklist?! So I do think this is probably much more so than the remote working piece and maybe that will develop but that this is already a thing. So, this might just unfold organically, but it's very much going to be about what the managing director does and what his view is. You know if he likes to see people five days a week, that'll mean we will need to be in five days a week. And I think you have really raised an important issue, if this occurs it definitely will negatively impact mothers. Like, if you are expected to be in 5 days a week and then they're noticing that you're not in five days a week, you know, what will happen then? So, we'll have to see. But I think to be honest, to date the MD has been very open minded about not caring where people work once they are working. You have choices. Yeah. And I mean, I know my old boss would never have been keen about working from home. I think it's been the best social experiment possible because everyone's experienced it together. So, people don't get to have a view anymore who've never done it, because now we've all done it and we all know you know, so it's really good.

**Interviewer:** This has been a fantastic conversation, thank you very much. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me in relation to your experience as a mother working remotely in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland?

**333:** I don't think so, except to say it's definitely benefited me personally. And I don't feel that personal benefit has come at any cost to the organization. Which is what it's all about, isn't it, really? So, I think I have gained hugely on a personal level. And the business has not suffered in any way. So, for me that's success for sure. It's a win/win. Everybody is happy.

That's it I suppose, if you think of anything else, just let me know. More than happy to answer any questions. I hope it turns out really well for you.

**Interviewer:** Thanks so much, have a lovely evening!

*Appendix L: Interview Transcript 444*

**Interviewer:** Thank you for consenting to take part in the study and also to consenting to the audio recording of this interview. One more question before we get started into it. For the purpose of this research a mother is defined as a woman in employment aged 15 to 64 with at least one child aged 0 to 14 living in the same household. Can you please confirm that you fall within that demographic?

**444:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:** OK so we will start with a couple of questions to gather an understanding of your general thoughts of working remotely as a mother. Can you briefly describe your experience of working remotely prior to the pandemic?

**444:** OK so before that, now my job changed literally the week of the pandemic anyway, so that kind of threw everything out of kilter. But before I would have worked remotely just one day a week. This was generally mid-week. So, I live in Mullingar and obviously work in Dublin so that would have always been a battle between me and my husband, in terms of dropping my little boy off to school. He is in school now but what would have been preschool, which is right next to the school, thankfully. It meant that one of us was always rushing like a mad person to get back for 6:00 o'clock. So generally, if I was in the office, I would have had to start leaving at half four to kind of get back. It could easily take an hour and a half and 6:00 o'clock was complete cut off. We haven't got any family support around us or anything. And so, it would always be that pressure of then getting out, getting back to pick him up and then logging on at night again to kind of make up for the hour and a half that you have missed if you well left early. So, it was always a complete rat race during the week and by Friday evening I was still shattered all the time. So that was pre-pandemic. Post pandemic and also pre pandemic I was pretty much taken parental leave on a Friday. So, I had the Friday to kind of have as a day off to, you know, do the washing, do the shopping. Pick him up a bit earlier and have little bit of us time together. Uh, because during the week it would always be kind of if I was later in the office and my husband was picking him up, I'd stay in the office longer to miss the traffic and then I wouldn't be home until half 7. And then getting in at half seven and trying to do more work it was just mad. And so obviously the pandemic happened, which meant I wasn't in the office. Now at the time the pandemic arrived the new job landed, which meant everything was even crazier. And the area of the

business that I work in had gone even crazier and sales were just so, so much more than usual. But then I had to try and do that with my son at home with me, who as then six and to be honest with you it was really, really just awful. My husband also works in a profession that was really busy during the pandemic and he was working all kinds of hours and he was literally just never at home. So that was particularly hard. To be honest I have just put that time into a little bubble that I want to forget. So, in terms of normal time now like our normal routine, what it means now is that I can drop my little son to school every morning for 9:00 o'clock. Perfect, I literally do a half an hour in the morning, which is half 8 to 9. Leave at 9 o'clock to drop to school and I'm gone 15 minutes. Then what? Half past nine I'm starting work and that's it. Then pretty much every day I would go and pick him up about 5:30. I must say like the stress is gone in the morning; the stress is gone. Look I don't do it every day and don't miss every meeting. Like there is a meeting on Wednesdays at 8:30 and I always drop him in before that at 8 o'clock. But generally, now the stress in the evening is also gone. I pick him up at 5:30 and I will make him his tea. I can take him swimming or I can do stuff socially with him now and then if it means I do another two hours after I've made him dinner and uh, come back on at about 8:00 o'clock till after 9 or 10 o'clock, I don't mind. I do it in general on the Monday and Tuesday. I do I like, on Monday, I normally take him swimming, so I finish it five, pick him up, take him swimming, come back and then I do 2 hours at night and it's fine. I mean, I don't mind it, because I'm just keeping on top of stuff, so it's changed everything for me. It's been amazing and I'm much calmer. I'm doing far more work and I know I'm far more productive. The stress is gone. The mad rat race has gone. On top of that stress, I actually have nails now! I never used to have that. So that kind of shows I'm not stressed like the way I used to be, even though work is mental. Also, for my career, doing the new job, I've almost had two promotions in the last two years. I've taken on a new role and also a whole new team. I wouldn't have been able to give that much at work before because I was always conscious of the drive, of my son, I don't want it. And I was like, I don't want this because, you know, I can't be managing a big team and have to be in the office five days a week. And before it was, well, you have got the team, you really should be seen there five days a week. And I thought, well, I don't want that because it just doesn't suit me. Whereas now, it doesn't matter. And I have got a bigger team and we're all very engaged. And so now I'm kind of going, well, what's next for me? Will I go for a role in a different location maybe in Cork or Northern Ireland? I can't see why not because this is the solution.

**Interviewer:** Asides from the benefit of removing the daily commute, can you describe elements of remote working which you feel as a mother enables you to develop your career?

**444:** Yes, there are lots of aspects which I love. Like there are two people on my team and they aren't based too far from here and we've never met. But yet, our working relationship is fantastic. With nearly two years now we're together and I feel like I've seen him every day, but I've never seen him and it's kind of a weird feeling. But I feel like I know him inside out and you know we have a chat about what we did weekend, so it's still very personable. But one thing is I've got my old friends in the organisation, who may not be in the same division as me now, in fact they're not, but you know, the people you can go to for the chat, the banter, or even just to let loose. So, I feel like if your new going into a new business, either me leaving the organisation and going somewhere new, or new people coming into us. I'm very conscious that they don't have that old bond that I think you really only get face to face. I don't know what you even called that it's like you know who you can really, really trust and I don't know if you, uh, don't know if you build that new trust relationship through a quick Teams call or going back-to-back. The other thing is I'm very conscious of this now. When you're in the office, you can have the chat. You have it while making like coffee and you build that little relationship, like someone saying oh look at your dress today or don't you look lovely? That is gone when it's remote and it is very much back-to-back to back-to-back meetings. And I'm I always now putting in an hour for my lunch time that one till two and I do try and get out for a walk because I would be the worst at working through that hour so you kind of have to be more mindful now of your health wellbeing than before. Older me never thought about that, even though I was doing the rat race. I feel socially you was kind of more in a good place and now that's gone. It is more work, work, work. As a mother that can be a little draining and I do miss meeting my other friends. So, you need to just, take time. So that's the only change in terms of wellbeing point of view. But at the same time the organisation appreciates that and has released some working from home guidelines to help us manage the amount of time we spend on screen.

**Interviewer:** As a mother, how do you feel this has impacted your career development opportunities?

**444:** Well, I wouldn't say it has negatively impacted me. I would just say that it is something I'm conscious off. But honestly working from home, and this is going back to those positives and it's something really, really nice. And I'm sorry I almost get emotional talking about this.

But every morning now I have a nice cuddle with my son in bed. It's so lovely in the morning. Then we go let's get up and have breakfast. We get up and have breakfast. The morning is calm and that is just so nice. And then I had that little bonding time with him every morning. Whereas before I was up at half 6, trying to put my face, hair, makeup, you know, nice dress and the madness of it all. Meaning I spend less time on me and my appearance and more time on him, you know quality time? It's quality time that you know, the are only young for so long. And now would you, don't you never get that back so, yeah, I think a big thank you to Covid for that.

**Interviewer:** Do you, as a mother working remotely, have access to a working environment which allows you to work to the best of your ability in comparison with working fathers? If not, why do you think this is the case?

**444:** Well, I don't think since we have stopped the home-schooling that there is a difference for mothers or fathers? Like for me it's kind of a nice working environment at home? So, I've got my own, I've got a room that we've converted into an office, which was a second living room. So, I mean, nice room. And I mean, I'm lucky from that respect. I've got an office that I can shut the door and it's nice. I would hate to think of any mother working from my kitchen table or dining room table and I know a lot of people don't have any option, so I'm very lucky with that. The only thing is, I mean my husband is full time and I think it's uh probably just gender stereotypes but still assumes the washing will be done, the shopping will be done, and that tea will be on the table. But in terms of that, and being a mother who is working remotely, I still have to remind my husband that yes, I am actually working. Even though I am working from home, I am still working. He's in and out sometimes and he sees me on the call all day and he will come in and drop me a cup of tea and a sandwich. But we have had little arguments to establish what the relationship is now. So, it's not me doing all the running. Out to school, back to school, all the housework. Yeah, I nipped that on the head because it just wouldn't work. Within my working hours, I am working. And that is that. Is that what you mean by that question?

**Interviewer:** Yes absolutely, it leads me to my next question. Do you think that remote working has reinforced traditional gender roles in the workplace? If so, how do you think this is preventing you from developing in your career?

**444:** Well, I don't think that its impacting upon my career but yes, those gender role or stereotype I suppose is definitely there. You know like the fathers are out earning all the

money while the mother is still at home working but doing most of the house stuff. Like because of my husband's job people are assuming that he's buying me things, or he bought my car for me or and it's like, uh, no, I actually earn more than he does, you know. But so, I think that assumption, I mean my sister is a director for a company yet still people think her husband earns more than her. Honestly like seriously? So, I think that's kind of just something.

**Interviewer:** What's your understanding of the term 'Maternal Wall'?

**444:** 'Maternal Wall'. Well before you contacted me, I had not heard of it before. Doesn't it mean like, for example, that if you're going out pregnant, well, it kind of holds you back?

**Interviewer:** Yes, that is an example of how aspects of the 'Maternal Wall' could interfere with a pregnant woman's career development. Essentially, it's very similar to the glass ceiling in that it refers to the systematic, and often subtle disadvantages that women, sorry I should say mothers face, in the workplace which inhibit or prevent them from climbing the corporate ladder. So, I suppose that could be anything from prejudice, discrimination, bias, or stereotyping. You know, it could be a mixture of those things. Could you please describe an experience of encountering any of those kinds of barriers since working remotely?

**444:** No, I don't think I can since working remotely. But I think that it depends on the manager and not the circumstance. Like all through my career it's been a very male dominated environment. Like I remember when I first started, I was the only female on the team. Like I used to go on trips and be like Oh my God, I'm the only woman here. I actually almost forgot I was a woman, to be fair. Uh, because I used to have the craic with all the boys. So, I've never really been conscious that I've been a woman. Does that sound bad? Do you know what I mean? I've just been like, OK, I'll do whatever I want, and I never felt like there was any prejudice there. Now, I was a late developer having my son, and I suppose I did have one experience. But funnily this wasn't a male manager, it was a female manager, with no kids. And she was older than me, so it was maybe her own prejudice. When I came back after maternity leave, I was offered an alternative position. This role suited me as it was much less stressful than what I had been doing before. But what my manager really thought was, well, she's coming back. She's probably going to go off and have all the kids now because she's only just got married. I just don't think it's suited her for me to be back on her team. Now as I said, it suited me because it was more flexible and less stressful, so I was happy to take it. But then she wanted me back to my original role. At this point, I was

pregnant again, but it was very early stages. When I explained I was pregnant I said, “well you probably don’t want me back do you”, her face kind of turned to thunder and she went “uh, no, I actually don’t then”. Like I know I was happy to take the other less stressful job, but still. But then I remember saying to her when I was coming back, can I work one day a week from home? And it was to work one day a week from home, just to save time with commute. And I swear, her words to me were, and I quote “well, I suppose you can, but I don't want you spending the day looking after your child”. Now my son was in creche full time. I don't want to spend the day looking him. But yeah, that experience wasn't related to remote working but happened prior to the pandemic. I suppose it's pretty relatable though as it's all kind of to do with mothers and flexibility, right? That's always stuck with me though because it wasn't a man, it was a woman. I found women to be the worst, to be honest. And now coming back with my son he's a bit older I've never felt it's been anything that's held me back. If anything, it probably gives you insights from another level because actually quite a lot of the senior leadership in this business are woman and you know most of them have all got kids. They know what it's like. And if anything, it's like, well, we can totally do it with just, you know, we probably have a bit more on our plate. Why should we be baled back because of kids? So, they've got a very kind of magical and heroic mindset. So, I think it depends on the prejudice the manager as opposed to it being related to remote working.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned that some of the senior female leaders in the business have kids. While it is fantastic to see within our organisation, women are still greatly underrepresented at leadership level in the wholesale or retail industry in Ireland. The most recent figure suggest that only 30% of senior executive roles are held by women, with that figure being even lower for mothers. How do you feel remote working could influence this?

**444:** I think it could really benefit mothers. Like see with me, I would have never considered a job in another location within the business before remote working. Whereas now, I'm kind of putting it down on my PDR and going, yeah, put me down for a more senior role. You know, maybe as a director in another part of the business. Absolutely it has opened so many doors. I'd love to do it. And if it means I need to spend a day or two up there. Fine. Because you know you could now juggle it. So, if anything for me, I'm kind of thinking now I have got more opportunity. Before it would have always been well what can I do that's within close proximity to me, with a manageable commute. Yeah, and even for my mental health, somebody who I really respect for the way she handles situations and she's very good is my mentor. She works in a totally different part of the business, and she would never have been

able to become my mentor if we hadn't embraced this remote approach as she lives on the other side of the country. She is also a mom too, and she has just been so inspiring. So, I do really believe that remote working will have a positive influence on the number of women in senior exec roles like you mentioned in the future.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe an experience where a colleague or manager assumed that you were less capable, as a mother working remotely than a father? - If so, do you feel this has prohibited you from progressing in your career?

**444:** No. I can't say I have. But I mean the two managers who I have worked for the last year have been brilliant. The only thing is in my own personal household where you know me, my husband have had "discussions" because you know he would be happy with me taking on the burden. Like, I've just been away this weekend and came back late last night to no milk, dogs not fed, nothing in the fridge for our son's lunch tomorrow morning. Seriously? Do I have to do everything? There is still that assumption that as a mother we will just do everything. And us mothers we do just do it, because needs to be done, and men don't see it. So, I just don't, I don't know if that's just men being cave men and women being the providers?

**Interviewer:** There is a growing concern amongst researchers that remote working may lead to a two-tiered workforce which benefit's men, obstructing the career development opportunities of mothers - What are your thoughts on this sentiment?

**444:** No. I wholeheartedly disagree, if anything, I think it puts us both on an equal playing field. Personally, because you are both at home, you're both working. You've now not got me running out of the office at half 4 like a mad banshee to try and get back. So, you know as far as anyone sees it, I'm probably here more.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel remote working has impacted your visibility in the workplace when compared with colleagues who are fathers?

**444:** So personally, for me I don't think it has affected my visibility. I have a great relationship with my manager and my peers. But the other thing is right. You know what, I do have a team of women working underneath me. And they predominantly would be, you know, like I need to go and take little Johnny to the doctors, or I need to go and finish early today to pick up or whatever. So, you do find it. Still the woman's role to do the child running. Now the guy I have working for me he doesn't have kids anyway, right? And the

other lady that works for me, her kids are all grown up. So, you wouldn't notice any difference either. But the younger mothers I would notice that they are doing all the running. It doesn't bother me at all. You know they will ask can I kind of start 10 minutes late because I've got to do this and that. I'd be like, yeah, what you even asking me for? It's like, just do it right. And even with my boss, I don't tell him what I'm doing. I just do it. But you could see other managers, and it comes back to a manager's perspective, you know favouring one person over the other. And I think it definitely comes down to perspective. Like you know, if let's say Mary was always running around after the kids and it was that manager I mentioned before, that could definitely put them on the back foot to get a role over somebody else. She would have seen that as oh you're slacking because you're picking up your kids. So yes, absolutely yes I do think that being a mum could impact your visibility. You could see that kind of being a factor.

**Interviewer:** How do you think this could impact your training and development opportunities relative to your peers who are fathers?

**444:** Uhm, again personally I don't think that it has impacted me you know. But I mean it may I think it would be up to the individual. Like there on this course and it finishes at 5:00 and then they have to, you know, pick the kids up. I think then it's up to me or to the employee to think well, what would it be like if I was in work and what do I need to do? Like what I do, there's a playschool option there until 6:00 o'clock. But I think it's up to the employee to have a structure that allows them to work around their personal and professional life. Proper childcare is just so important.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel being a mother impacts upon your chances of promotion? Does remote working impact this?

**444:** As I said I have had basically two promotions in the last two years, so I really don't think that being a mother had anything to do with it. I don't believe that bias is present. In this organisation though I do believe that the best person for the job gets the job, and whether you've got kids or not and you need some, maybe clock off at 5:00 o'clock two days a week. It doesn't matter. I do believe that in this business, we have a very fair view on that. So uhm, it personally for me, no, it would be the best person for the job. And I've just promoted someone within my team who's got a young, you know, she was a single parent running around after a kid still, and she's got a promotion. So, for me if they are right for the job, they are right for the job. You just need to be somewhat flexible and work around hours with

them. Hmm, how does remote working impact a mother's promotional opportunities. Well, you know, if that mother I just mentioned who got that promotion. Well, if she had physically still been in the office and she was going early like I would have done. You know going early and, you know, coming in late and then having to go for an hour and the office day was nine till five. Then you'd kind of go. Jesus, she's definitely not doing the 37 hours because she came in late and now finishing early. Now she could have been clocking on at home and she is very conscientious. She actually work the other Sunday because there were that busy. So, I know she's a grafter. But you know maybe somebody else might not see her potential like I do. You know that old culture "oh half day is it" when you leave at 4pm or come in after 9am. You know, it's all this kind of stuff, right? Yeah. Other comments over the years. But that's gone now. Because all this nipping out and coming back and whatever. It's almost masked by remote working. So, if you do nip out for 15 minutes or you do have to finish early, it doesn't matter because you just make up for it in the evening. Then you're more productive because you are doing the two hours when you're not getting Phone calls left, right and centre. So, if anything that motherly responsibilities that still fall mainly on us is hidden by remote working.

**Interviewer:** That's brilliant. I am consciously you need to jump onto your next call, so is there anything else that you would like to share with me in relation to your experience as a mother working remotely in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland?

**444:** Yeah, so basically, I just want to reiterate that remote working has given me more flexibility to focus on my work. And I do think that played a huge part in enabling me to have 2 promotions in 2 years. Like if I do need to log off early it's no big deal, I could come back and do 2 hours and get me head down and it was fine. I don't mind it. Another point I'd like to make is that my office environment is actually better. Like I'm looking out into a field and not a car park. Before Covid I actually lost my desk and before that I lost my office. So, when I would come into the office, I was always hot desking, which then meant you know you're always getting the chat and the distractions and that. Now I have my own office here at home, it's big, everything laid out like I like it and I can actually feel like I've got a better workspace. To focus and concentrate on stuff. For example, I was given a project which involved pulling quite a complex technical price strategy together. One of the directors said to me, Jesus we have been trying to pull that info for almost 10 years now. Now I'll be honest it nearly broke me trying to do it, but it was being at home that allowed me to focus really well and do what we needed to do. I worked very late when I was doing that project, but I

didn't mind because I was at home and didn't have to commute and I didn't feel the same mom guilt I would have felt if I was physically in the office. This was another huge driver in allowing me to focus. Like since finding this lovely balance I've been far more strategic and I haven't been getting involved with the everyday stuff and think, well, what's around the corner, what do you need to do. Working remotely gave me that headspace to do that. Uh, which has then let me be a better worker for the business and get promotion off the back of it. Also managing other people. Now I can spend a good half an hour managing people and I can get round or my team in a week because even if it's, I'm busy, can we meet at 8:00 o'clock and I'm like, Are you sure? And we can put an 8:00 o'clock call in. So, it's led me to be a better team player to be a better manager because I can devote that time. Also, it's just given me, now that I'm working full time again, it allowed me to have a structure. Like in the morning this is time for my son. I have my breakfast time with him, and I have bedtime with him. Then I'm at work. And I focus on work. I will finish at half five, not at half four. Not stressed. Go and pick him up. So that's kind of allowed me now to have a cleaner and a better work life balance. This has definitely allowed me to be a better person at work and allowed me to take over this bigger area at work. Like they asked me to take this over 2 years ago and I was like, no, not doing it. Because they wanted me to be in the office 5 days and as a mum, I just cannot do that. So I turned it down. Now that it's come up again I took the opportunity. It's not that I did the promotion for the money, I had to do the promotion to suit me. Now it's acceptable that I don't have to be physically in the office the whole time to manage the team. I've been in this role a few months now and I have to say I think it's working great. We're making great traction and great synergies and it's combining the other team and this team and it's working brilliantly. So, all that combined has given me the scope to actually say, you know, I will do that job. I'm better as a person because I'm going for a walk at lunchtime when I actually do take the time, I need you know. I'm managing the hours to suit the team and my son, and I am really giving absolutely everything I have got to this organisation. The other thing is sorry last thing! The other thing is that I think remote working has helped me as a mom because the business knows me, and I know the business. I just don't know if it would be the same for a new mother coming into the business? Would they be treated with the same amount of trust, and I suppose respect? I don't know about that. And I do worry about people going into new businesses and getting that same kind of mutual trust that my manager has for me. I don't know. That would be my only caveat to that.

**Interviewer:** Thanks so much, that is wonderful thank you.

*Appendix M: Interview Transcript 555*

**Interviewer:** Thank you for consenting to take part in the study and also consenting to the audio recording of this interview. One last question before we get into it. For the purpose of this research a mother is defined as a woman in employment age 15 to 64 with at least one child aged 0 to 14 living in the same household. Can you please confirm that you fall into that demographic?

**555:** Yep.

**Interviewer:** Perfect. So, to begin, I would like to get a brief overview of your perspective I suppose of remote working. Could you please briefly describe your experience of working remotely prior to the pandemic.

**555:** OK, so in my current role? OK, well I suppose I have very little remote working or formal remote working experience prior to the pandemic. I suppose the way the organisation is set up that we all have access means that we should have access to remote working but prior to the pandemic I would have only worked maybe on day maximum out of a week at home, but on a random and very ad hoc basis with my managers approval. So, uh, if there was something that just wasn't happening in the office and I needed the focus time, I would have been able to work it from home before the pandemic. Uh, you know, on request, I suppose. And then and I think one time I had to be here for somebody coming to the house and my manager was absolutely fine with me working from home for that. I think. The role lends itself to working from home because we are issued with laptops, which means you know, sort of indicates that you have a sort of a mobile nature anywhere. Um that's it though, just then on those occasions, working from home pre pandemic, I suppose.

**Interviewer:** Could you please describe to me your experience of working remotely since the pandemic and how it has changed?

**555:** It is a great way of getting focused work done, if that makes sense because people couldn't see you in in the office, you physically were out of sight, out of mind and everything was done on email, you know. Which didn't really work I suppose. Whereas post pandemic it doesn't work like that with Microsoft Teams it is just so much more interactive. You know it's more of a chatty type of interface. I know we were adopting teams a little bit before

pandemic, it was in the organisation for about 6 to 9 months before the pandemic, but it felt like really only just kicked it off at the same time as the pandemic. When people started using it properly. It felt like that.

So, it just makes huge difference. I have one son who's 11 and when he was home for home schooling and stuff like that, I just felt guilty for actually for being in the house working. You know, being busy but leaving him to his own devices because I was working. Even though he's old enough to be left as all devices as well. You know, perhaps if he was younger, it would have been harder or more difficult. Maybe I would have had to look at different hours or something. The fact that he's older, he spent a lot of time on his own. And I felt guiltier than I would have if I was actually going out to work, because we would have arranged some form of proper childcare. It just felt worse in a way when he was home.

But now that he's back in school, working from home is really working for me. For example, now this is obviously with my managers approval, but I am able to drop to school and you know maybe no sit down at my desk until 9:15am or 9:10am. Or pick up from school and just take those 15 minutes to go. And it just makes a huge difference. Not necessarily to my son because I don't think he could care less, but to me it does. I feel like I am more involved in his schooling, and I get to see his friends and stuff like that, which I would always have missed out on, always. I've never dropped to schools, you know, before this time or never picked up from school before this. So uhm, you know, I think being able to take this time with my son in the mornings or maybe after lunch does allow me to focus more and work to the best of my ability. And I do think that's down to having a supportive manager you know who isn't micromanaging. A manager who isn't keeping tabs to see if your Microsoft Teams icon is on yellow or that you're away from your desk. I don't I don't ever get that feeling. But I suppose as a person I would be a conscientious person. I would expect that my manager has given me that trust because he knows he can. As opposed to me taking the hand because that's not what's happening here. You know what I mean? So yes, working remotely definitely works better for me. Don't get me wrong there are elements of it that I would change. For example, I have worked more since working remotely. I have worked much later than my normal coming home time, so yes at times it may not be ideal.

**Interviewer:** Maternal employment rates have been rising steadily in recent years – How do you think remote working could impact these rates?

**555:** I think remote working will be hugely beneficial to future mothers, provided they have sufficient childcare. I think one lesson that we all learned from the pandemic is that although overnight parents across Ireland became teachers as well as parents and workers, it is not possible to mind children as well as work to the best of your ability. Your work would suffer as well as your wellbeing and mental health. I do think though if businesses put the right supports in place for mothers, remote working will definitely contribute to the rise of mothers in the workforce, however.

**Interviewer:** Recent CSO statistics suggest that women found it harder to work from home than men during the pandemic - What are your thoughts on this sentiment?

**555:** No, I don't think so. But I don't know, I can't speak for women in general. But I suppose for me personally, I hated it at the start. I hated the lack of social interaction, and I hated the loss of structure to my day. But I think everybody had that feeling. I don't specifically think that it affected women, it was a symptom of the pandemic. Now, here we are, we are two years in and the thoughts of going into the office! I'm going into the office for the first time, and I'm going to book a desk and go into the office on Wednesday. I am very reluctant about it. Already I'm thinking oh no what do I have to wear? You know, the whole trackie uniform just won't cut it on Wednesday, so I just have to find something else. It's not like I'm constantly dressing up to the nines for work, but the fact that you don't have to think about it, it's one less thing to worry about as a mother. It's one less thing on that mental load almost? It's one less thing to have to think about. So now that we're kind of used to working from home, I'm probably going to find it harder to go back. In this hybrid model that we're attempting to approach, I'm going to be weighing heavily on the homework, versus the office work. I will use those office days as the days where you get in person meetings. Although at times you know, like it has been a difficult two years. I think I've worked with new people for two years that I haven't worked here before and never met them. And that just feels unnatural, you know. I feel really bad for them it must be a horrible way to start. But back to your question, do I think it was harder for women than men? I don't know. I think for me in my role it certainly doesn't make any difference where I do my work from be that at home or in the office. I'm also very lucky that my husband works from home anyway, he's always been home. I am glad that I have the choice now going forward to work from home or the office. If I didn't I do think that I would have considered looking elsewhere for a job with a little more flexibility.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel remote working will impact the career development opportunities of mothers within the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland when compared with fathers?

**555:** So, I don't think that it makes a difference whether you are a mother or father really. But I do actually think since we have started working remotely that the communication, within this business anyway, has been much better as to what opportunities are there. Like I know it's only recently we've started getting job specs and stuff like that like. To me, I know opportunities were being placed on a notice board over in the main building, but I was never seeing those jobs. They didn't pass by me. So now that we're predominantly getting the communications electronically and I'm a desk-based employee, I suppose I'm seeing them. Whereas before I wasn't seeing them. I didn't go to the canteen, I didn't see them in the little mezzanine places, you know, simply they didn't come over to where I worked. We never saw them. So now that that's happening, I actually think the communication is getting a little bit better. We're working in a remote working environment world, so, uhm, I suppose, we are empowered to look further in order to keep in touch, to know what's happening with the business. You do tend to log on to the portal and just see what they have you know? Like take a quick look at the news or the whatever is on the landing page that probably I wouldn't have been that interested in reading before. Or not even reading you'd hear it, and in conversation you know, if it affected you, you would hear it in conversation. So, I think because we're working from home, we're certainly seeking out that information a little bit more. I also think that there are some opportunities on the portal that I wouldn't have considered before as I wouldn't have fancied the idea of relocating. The fact that we can now apply for a role within the business and be based anywhere in Ireland has opened many doors. Uhm, as for opportunities for mothers specifically? I really don't think that being a mother working remotely has an influence. I think the fact that that I'm in a department that's kind of in flux at the moment there isn't clarity currently as to where my role is going but that's simply because there's been management changes. So, I would expect that as soon as that that settles in, there will be a bit more of a career development path for me. For me again though personally, my son is that little bit older and at present I am not particularly seeking a career advancement. But then again if the opportunity arose you never know!

**Interviewer:** So, if an opportunity did arise, how would remote working impact your decision to advance?

**555:** It's hard to answer that question right now as I just don't know! Hmm, but I suppose remote working could actually put me off it to be honest. So, when we talked at the start there about new people having joined the company, I feel very strongly that were not supporting new people that have joined the company. Uh you know, even in our, within our own teams, like we're not. It's really hard to pick up what this organisation is like as a business, it takes years to understand. a few years. It's really, really hard to do. And then when somebody new comes in, or when somebody starts a new role or advances in their career and they don't have that opportunity to hang on the edge of somebody's chair and just listen to what they're talking about or go to every meeting with them physically and have the preamble on the way to a meeting and the preamble on the way back from a meeting to set context, I think it is really tough. So, in a remote environment to take on a new role or to take on and a brand-new role would be I think eh quite tough to be honest. Yeah, so depends. Like if you're up for the challenge, like. But I think the remote working could very easily mean people get stagnated. I don't think that it again is a problem specific to women or mothers or not as anything, you know, just in general? Could there possibly be a greater impact on mother? Yes, possibly but I think within this business it could affect people across the board. That's that would be my thoughts on it.

**Interviewer:** So, what is your understanding of the term, the 'Maternal Wall'?

**555:** Well, it's a relatively new phrase to me, could you explain it a little more to me please?

**Interviewer:** Basically, it's similar to the glass ceiling in that it describes the systematic disadvantages that mothers face in the workplace. So, you know, bias, prejudice, stigma, etc., Any of those kinds of penalties, I suppose that women can face as a result of being a mother. Can you explain your experience of encountering the 'Maternal Wall' and how do you think remote working has impacted that?

**555:** So, uh-huh so I'm going to say I have never experienced any of those behaviours from a negative perspective. I'm trying to think. I am aware of other mothers within my team or that I'm working with, and I would be conscious of times that would be scheduling meetings because I know so and so does the school run at such and such a time. So, you know, I won't put in something before half nine with that person or you know those sorts of things, but I'm not sure that that is a negative if you get me? I don't think that mothers ever miss out on meetings or conversations as a result of that this. Like I think if you're working with people that you need to understand how their life works. But then again, these people, if they were

working in the office, they wouldn't be doing the school run. Oh God, I'm trying to think, Is there any other scenarios? Oh yes, so just last week I had a GP appointment for my son, it was one of those phone appointments. You know, you're given sort of an hour block and it turns out she rang just as I was due to present something and unfortunately, I had to miss the GP call. Now I was able to call the GP back soon after. But if this had happened in a non-remote environment, I wouldn't have been able to attend the meeting, I would have excused myself and I would have been home with my son. Cause you know you don't feel like you can excuse yourself as easily from a Teams meeting as you can from a physical meeting you know? In the remote environment it's almost like attending the meeting is almost proof of life or proof of working. Do you know what I mean?

**Interviewer:** So, do you think that remote working will lead to a corporate culture of presenteeism?

**555:** Yes, I do think that people will feel like they have to be seen for them to know what you're doing. And I'm saying them. The big, you know, the big bad them – there is nothing there! I'm just saying. It's, uh, it's probably a personal feeling. I do know other people certainly have no problems excusing themselves from meetings, but maybe it's just me but I do think that although I will rely heavily on remote working that visibility will be a factor. But hmm, the 'Maternal Wall'. It's hard to think of anything actually to be honest. That's probably a good sign for the business, though right? Good for our culture?

**Interviewer:** Have you heard of the motherhood penalty? If so, how has this theory impacted your development?

**555:** Yes, I read about this. Now I'm only just throwing it out there as a conversation, not that I've thought about it or felt like I've missed out. That's not what I'm saying here. I'm not saying that I feel like I've been penalised or kept back. However, I don't believe that for those first ten years or whatever, when you're really busy with a toddler and for a father who's working out of the home, that it is the same as for a mother. I do think that they would potentially progress in those few years and therefore if you're looking at peer to peer, you know whether it's age group or you're starting at the same level in the company, you might just see those differences after, for example a mother versus a non-mother, whether that's a woman without children or a father. So yeah.

**Interviewer:** Empirical evidence suggests that women spend twice as much time as men on domestic duties – How do you feel remote working has impacted upon traditional gender roles?

**555:** Hmm I suppose I can see it in my house yes! Ah no I'm messing, as I said before my husband has always worked from home and I am very lucky for that as we generally share the housework and caregiving responsibilities. It may not always be 50:50 but it does allow me to find a suitable balance between my domestic and professional responsibilities which definitely ehm, reduces stress and allows me to focus more I suppose? I think working remotely give us back more time too to spend on our duties in the home. Now in the workplace, uhm. Well, no, I don't see remote working impacting on gender roles, well certainly not in my department or team. I don't. We don't see it. I have certainly never seen anybody say he or she can or can't do that based on a gender assertion, do you know what I mean? Or isn't a brilliant that as a mother or as a father or they're doing that? I mean, it's not, it's certainly not something that I would have seen or witnessed, I guess? I think if I had witnessed any forms of prejudiced behaviours like this, I would have called them out also. I really don't believe that anyone within the organisation believes that once someone becomes a mother that she becomes any less capable. I don't think people work like that. I think that's a weird way to approach work. But yeah, look it's hard to know. I mean, speaking for myself. So as mother, I'm 45 now and my son is 11. So, I probably would have been seen as you know an older mother, and you know your thirties or whatever. I definitely wouldn't have considered taking on any new jobs or new challenges but that is purely just because of the age that my son was. I do think there is something to be said for that that age brackets. Again, as I said in our home situation, my husband has always worked from home. My husband has always been I suppose the primary caregiver when I was working full time. You know, when we when he wasn't at school, and I wasn't in in full time childcare? So uhm, yeah, I guess remote working has impacted upon that as now I'm the primary caregiver, because I can be! It really does allow for the best of both worlds. I do suppose the fact that he is older helps too. It's just once they get to that certain age where they can do simple things like getting to the toilet on their own. It just makes difference.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me about the impact that you feel this has had on your career development?

**555:** Yeah, I would, as I say I wouldn't have been as open to new challenges or even new locations before moving to remote working as I wouldn't have been able to balance my responsibilities as a mother and as a professional in the way in which I would have liked.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe some of the obstacles you have faced as a mother working remotely?

**555:** So, I feel I have only faced obstacles as a human working remotely. This whole mother piece, I'm trying to put myself in that description. Like I would never, if I was describing myself, I would never put on the hat and say, yeah, I'm a mother. It's not like me, I wouldn't. I would say I'm a wife. I wouldn't say, it just isn't a hat, a role, or a descriptor I would use to describe myself, so it's hard to sort of put my head into that space actually. Yeah, which is weird. And so uhm. So, as I said I suppose the social piece is an obstacle. You know the connection that you get from work colleagues, the shared experience. Uh, remotely is different. You know, sharing experiences is different. Um, as a mother working remotely. I see remote working remotely as a mother, as a positive. That's because most the business has supported me with you know, the trust to act. You know the trust that is, if you need to do something in business hours, have at it. You know what I mean? As long as you get to work done, there is nobody questioning you. So, I actually think see working from home as a mother as a huge positive, day to day. Now whether this has an impact upon career development kind of remains to be seen because I think everything has nearly been on pause for two years and as I said within my team will there be a restructure or not restructure? That's kind of coincided with those two years of Covid, so I don't think we could make a judgment call on it really at this point. Again, as I said before, as long as the comms continues the way it's going things can only get better. We are being provided with more information more often and we are sharing information more freely, I don't think working remotely will have any negative impact on mother's career development. I think it will be difficult initially with some people being in the office and others working from home, but I do think that it's mostly role dependant. Like if you're in a role where you need to interact with humans, I just don't know how practical that would be working remotely full time, and maybe that could impact your development? I do think it's again largely down to your manager and the relationship that you both have. It is all about the trust. I don't know, I'm sorry I'm veering off and struggling to view this from the lens of a mother again, forgive me!

**Interviewer:** No, not at all, it's no problem.

**555:** I think it's just going to be really hard to judge, like I haven't changed roles and I can only empathize with those who have. During this last couple of months or years, you know? I think it is going to be tough.

**Interviewer:** That's OK we can move on to the next question. This question has two parts. First, how do you feel being a mother impacts upon your chances of promotion. Second, how does remote working impact this?

**555:** Uh, so first of all I don't think being mother impacts your opportunities for promotion at all. Again, for me I do think that this could be down to my home situation. So, I don't think being a mother impacts upon that, except for the mom guilt type thing. I don't personally find that a huge barrier, but I do think that remote working makes it worse. So I said the mom guilt was worse when working from home strangely enough? In terms of the impact that remote working. Uh, personally speaking and working from home, this is probably more of a barrier. And that's because of the um you know, sort of the nerves that come with a new role, and the challenges that come with a new role anyways. They're difficult and daunting in the traditional environment and then the work from home not being able to physically gauge how people are responding to you or not. I think remote working would definitely make that more difficult, I think. I do believe that it's more of a challenge to consider changing roles in the work from home, irrespective of being a mother or not.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything else that you would like to share with me in terms of your experience of a mother working remotely?

**555:** Em, I can't think. Hmm, working remotely as a mother? I'm still thinking about that 'Maternal Wall' question, and have I experienced it? But to wrap up you know, I just think that the motherhood bit, the working from home it's only a positive. It's only positive. I've had more of an opportunity to spend time with my son because I'm working from home. More of an opportunity to be flexible because I'm working from home and so. I honestly don't see a negative in it, from a motherhood perspective. I think any of the negative impacts would have to be very specific to your home situation. Do you get me? If I was in a more challenging home situation, I think that would have fed into my answers to your questions. I do think the research you are doing and the responses you receive will all come down to where a mother is in her motherhood journey. I think it's really important to do interviews like this as sometimes the statistics don't really accurately represent people's views. Did you get enough detail, I hope I was clear?

**Interviewer:** Yeah that's super clear. Thank you so much for volunteering to participate, it's greatly appreciated. Have a lovely day. See you now. Bye. Bye.

*Appendix N: Interview Transcript 666*

**Interviewer:** Thank you for consenting to take part in the study and also to consenting to the audio recording of this interview. One more question before we get started into it. For the purpose of this research a mother is defined as a woman in employment aged 15 to 64 with at least one child aged 0 to 14 living in the same household. Can you please confirm that you fall within that demographic?

**666:** Yep I do!

**Interviewer:** Super OK so we will start with a couple of questions to gather an understanding of your general thoughts of working remotely as a mother. Can you briefly describe your experience of working remotely prior to the pandemic?

**666:** Unfortunately, prior to the pandemic remote working wasn't an option. My manager wouldn't even consider it so yeah, it was totally out of the question.

**Interviewer:** How has your experience of remote working changed since the pandemic?

**666:** OK so first of all, I have to say I absolutely love working remotely. It's excellent because it gives you the chance of being able to not have to commute. So, from a family friendly perspective to me it's invaluable. I used to have an hour and a half commute. Whereas now, I've got time to get up and exercise in the morning, then come back and on time for the children getting up and getting ready for school and drop off and everything like that. I suppose from the child perspective, I think the important thing is that a mother is the only doing one thing at once, so you can't be working and minding children at the same time. And I think that's neither fair to the employer or to the children, you have to be very mindful in relation to that. I think that it's giving me more time to be part of the community, to be doing collections for school, Lunch break, etc. And I think it's had huge benefits in relation to those things. I suppose concerns would be that, potentially women, when you go to look at some of the research and some of the studies, that women have been drawn into doing some more of the household chores and it just making sure that that doesn't have a long-term impact on women in the workforce. Particularly, given the fact that going forward, a lot of people would be moving back into the offices. Some people maybe of the younger demographics or single people may be more inclined to go into the office and that. Therefore, you want to make sure that your policies don't just reward people that are in the office and

sort of encourage presenteeism that its impact people fairly across the board and people are rewarded fairly for what they do.

**Interviewer:** What is your understanding of the term ‘Maternal Wall’?

**666:** I had not heard the term before, but I'm very interested in women in the workplace, and actually it's linked a bit to gender pay all of that. And my question is. We recently did this leadership exercise in a trio and do a case sample of what you know you could do to improve the business or yourself. And actually, I started off about this very generic one about the business strategy and how we are all going to work together. And I actually ripped it up following a meeting with a manager and instead actually did my hypothesis based on why have I unknowingly limited myself? So, I think as a woman you think because I work say three days that you need to just put your head down and actually be grateful for what you've got because actually not that many people have a part time position. Is at the position you want? No. Does it give you the flexibility? Yes. Is it still a good job and is the pay good? Yes. So actually, you stopped looking potentially at the role and you are kind of I suppose eh like the famous quote; “you can have it all but not at the same time”. So, what do you actually want at the same time without juggling? Because it's impossible to everything at the same time at the right place. And so, I think about this a lot. I do believe that the ‘Maternal Wall’ is in place. Because I think, you know, to get to a very senior level you have to have a very supportive partner unless you are prepared to spend an awful lot of money on childcare. A partner who has flexibility etc. To be able to support that. So, I think from a practical perspective is that the ‘Maternal Wall’ in one way? No. Is it potentially that only one person in a relationship can be performing at a certain level of seniority? Maybe? Now that has probably eased because of the fact that people aren't commuting and traveling etc. So, it's probably more possible. But I do think it's a mindset. I do think in particular with people over the age of say thirty or thirty-five. I think the new generation are actually challenging it better and actually saying yes, I can have it all or what does that mean for me and they're actually looking at different things from different perspectives. You know flexibility is more important to them, annual leave is more important to them. Whereas I would include myself in that generation whereby your nearly luck to have a job. Or you are lucky to have any kind of flexibility. That you actually stop looking and you're going to go OK what my priorities? Well, that's all bull, basically, because actually, you don't have to work 24/7 to be in a high place. It needs to be about delivery than presenteeism, and it needs to be a mind shift change. Yeah, you can have it all if you're good at your job. You need to listen to the CEO of

Vodafone; she was saying that it's about trying to average the time. So, she can have it all, but not the same time. So instead, maybe looking at trying to get a balance on a weekly or monthly basis rather than daily. And I think that's a huge thing that moms try to do. Rather than trying to achieve everything in the day, which I think we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to do. So, I do think 'Maternal Wall'? Yes, it is there, it's two pronged and I think it's up to us to help women change their perception on what they can deliver. Because actually, if you look at it when you go back to school studies, etc. the girls are actually performing at a higher level. And in the Irish workforce, women are more educated than men. But somewhere along the way that switches? It's not there in schools. So, what changes in the mindset of people between the ages of maybe 18 and 24 or so when they enter the workforce? doing 18 and potential and again to workforce and potentially went when they go on again as well. And I do think it's less of a culture with females of wanting to rock the boat. And I think that's from everything from their job and what roles they go for. And like I mean studies will show, woman look at jobs and if they don't meet like 5 the five criteria, they won't go for it. But they will show that to a lot of men won't meet the criteria, but they'll put their hat into the ring, and they're actually fight for the role. So, I do think it's a two pronged, but I also think there is a huge responsibility on the organisation as we move back into the workplace that we're encouraging and making sure that we are showing leadership behaviours. What I mean by leadership behaviour is that we're not reverting back to presenteeism etc. whereby we could leave a generation, particularly young mothers, behind. That could take us actually backwards rather than forwards in relation the future of work, which I do think hybrid working has enabled to step up.

**Interviewer:** Have you heard of the motherhood penalty? If so, how has this theory impacted your work since working remotely?

**666:** Yes, I have heard of this, but thankfully it isn't something that I have experienced myself since working remotely. But I can imagine I can remember about 5 years ago being on a board meeting and I was the only female there. My boss at the time was a male. He stood up stood up at half 5 and said, "I've got to go, it's my turn to take the kids swimming today". And everyone was like "Oh well done, well done" And I just said to myself, a woman wouldn't stand up and say that they wouldn't make that announcement because they would feel like they would be completely judged, whereas it's actually nearly applauded when a man does it?

To be honest though I don't think I've ever been discriminated against since working remotely in fairness. What I do think is that I discriminate against myself, and I limited myself with all the social pressures on it. And there's a lot of social pressure within work and outside work whereby you have to have rounded kids that are going to all these different activities and one person running around ragged, do you know that kind of a way?

**Interviewer:** Do you feel as though you have been held to a higher standard as a mother working remotely when compared with your peers who are fathers? If so, why do you think this is and has this impacted on your work?

**666:** Again, I haven't personally but I do think that remote working could impact how we perceive mothers. I think it's going to need to be about how we role model that behaviour at leadership level. Because as I said, I think we could take a big step backwards rather than forwards if we get it wrong and I'm very kind of nervous melts in relation to that. I think as a result the hybrids we have become more flexible. You know a lot more mothers do drive their kids' schools, so we're not doing kind of 8:30 meetings. I think the business has got the right principles in place, but I'm not sure that we always adhere to them. But I also think we actually don't have the luxury of not doing enough because we're currently in the talent crisis, like it's a fight for talent. I was actually talking to one of my colleagues there last week. His wife has worked for a company. They said that they had to go back into the office three days a week. It's an IT company and they had five resignations on their desk by the 2nd day of that week. With people not wanting it. So, I actually don't think it's a nice to do. I think it's a must do, in particular in the war for talent and making sure that we don't lose people to competitors.

**Interviewer:** That's an interesting anecdote as a recent survey by IBEC found that mothers are less likely to leave their job if they have access to remote working arrangements - Can you explain why you think that is the case?

**666:** I think I can speak on behalf of most mothers here in saying that we just have so, so, so much to do every day. Like in terms of finding a work life balance, so many of us wanted to work remotely before the pandemic and we weren't given the choice to do so. I think it has honestly changed the lives of so many women, you know? Without impacting the business that is. Particularly now that we have all had a taste of it? Like we have worked remotely, successfully, for the last two years. I think if employers try to take that flexibility away from working mothers it will lead to drastic consequences. So many mothers I know feel the same.

Everyone is so much more relaxed and actually I think people attitudes towards work and life in general are so much more positive. If people are forced back into a way of working which doesn't suit them when they know that the alternative option is available elsewhere, then yes 100% you will begin to see people leaving their jobs. I think that this goes for all people not just mothers, but certainly mothers in particular.

**Interviewer:** Do you, as a mother working remotely, have access to a working environment which allows you to work to the best of your ability when compared with working fathers?

**666:** Absolutely. I think that once you have childcare in place it should be exactly the same. And I also think that the key is finding that place that you can focus on your work. So, initially I was working next to the playroom, and this just didn't work. Having somewhere to work separate to where you eat, separate to where you sleep, separate to the rest of the house is just key to success. You do need to set yourself up for that. You know, you need to make sure it's professional as well. Once you find that space I find that remote working is an ideal environment in which to really concentrate and focus on the work at hand.

**Interviewer:** Recent CSO statistics suggest that women found it harder to work from home than men during the pandemic - What are your thoughts on this sentiment?

**666:** I can safely say I don't find it harder, but I suppose yes potentially. Like I wouldn't take breaks like other people would. So, I probably would do domestic chores. Run and do a shop. Put on a wash. And then I think you need to be mindful of your own health. Like I go out and exercise every morning at 6:30am. So, I am probably sleeping better and just reorganizing my work life a little bit better so I can do my exercise at 6 in the morning and by half seven I'm done. Therefore, I probably don't need to do as much, but I do not take breaks regularly. Like I'd run down and grab a quick cup of tea and things like that which is probably contrary to what I know a lot of my male colleagues and my male friends would do from the work life balance perspective.

**Interviewer:** So, I suppose you have alluded to some of the domestic responsibilities there. Empirical evidence suggests that women spend twice as much time as men on domestic duties – How do you feel remote working has impacted that?

**666:** I think that the division of responsibilities was like that beforehand. Like I just think, it's just for me, it's a lot more efficient. I feel I have more time for myself in the evenings, etc.

But I think there is apparently a fascinating book I need to read called “Silent Jobs” and how people do fall into situations. And you know how you best challenge it as well, so you know.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So how do you think that remote working has, I suppose, reinforced the traditional gender roles? How do you think this is preventing you from developing in your career?

**666:** Yes absolutely. And well I suppose studies will show that well women have slipped in relation to taking up more of the responsibilities around the home as well. Do I feel like that has impacted my career? No, I don't think so. In terms of other mothers, I suppose it depends on whether it bothers you. I don't know whether you just get on and accept it. Like it doesn't actually bother me because the stuff just has to get done, so it just gets done. I think I don't spend that much time thinking about it. I probably spend a lot more time doing it. So, you know, for me no I don't really think that it's having any impact on me or my career. I suppose I'm fortunate in the fact that I have good work ethics. I don't think people would kind of question what I have done or when I will get it done. It might not be during the hours that I'd want it to be done, but it be done and completed the majority of time. Like there has certainly been a shift in the culture of the business since the onset of the pandemic. We are now trusted to act which enables women and mothers to get the job done.

**Interviewer:** There is a growing concern amongst researchers that remote working may lead to a two-tiered workforce which benefit's men, obstructing the career development opportunities of mothers - What are your thoughts on this sentiment?

**666:** I don't think there's differences in the opportunities. I do think there's differences in the take up. Because you know when is the time? Like I've often thought about going back and doing a course and like where are the hours? Like with the number of hours I work and the amount of stuff I have got going on with the kids, have I actually got time? So, I suppose yeah maybe there are different opportunities for mother's vs fathers because I do think you are right, I don't think that fathers immediately have that thought? I think generally that burden of how best to divide your time automatically falls on the mother. But that's again a personal choice rather than somebody else impacting that on me if that makes any sense? But to answer your question in relation to the remote working part of the question, I think that remote working may have the opposite impact. I think it'll be hugely beneficial to working mothers as career development opportunities arise as you know it will mean less time away from the family home. Do you know that kind of way?

**Interviewer:** So can you describe some of the aspects of work remotely which you feel have benefited your career development?

**666:** Oh God yeah, loads. I've swapped jobs I think four times now. The most recent role I've taken up is an all-Ireland role which simply would not have been possible beforehand. Before now some of the roles I would have liked to have taken would have been based more so down the country and so now you can actually do the role based on what you want to do rather than location etc. This cross divisional working via Teams has really helped me grow as a professional. I've got more experience, I'm understanding people more due to differing jurisdictions, North and South of the border. This has all really helped my career development massively. It has allowed me to move on to a role which I am actually really enjoying as well.

**Interviewer:** How do you feel being a mother impacts upon your chances of promotion? Does remote working impact this?

**666:** Eh does it? That's a good question! I don't think it impacts from the company's position. Like there certainly isn't any evidence of discrimination or bias towards mothers when considering talent for a promotion. Well certainly not that I am aware of. But I do think it would impact a mothers own personal decision and whether you as a mother want to take on extra roles and responsibilities, you know? I think the question you are asking though; I anticipate that we will see a greater impact when we see that phased return to the office on a hybrid basis. I am fearful of that concern surrounding presenteeism and what that could potentially mean for mothers. You know that kind of way. So, I don't think it's a company thing. I do think it's a decision as to whether you want to be going for certain jobs because they potentially lead to a loss of flexibility or an increase in working hours. Like in my case that would be a five-day week whereas I just don't want that.

**Interviewer:** How do you think remote working could influence your decision to take a promotion?

**666:** Yes. And I think it would make me and other mothers more positively disposed to taking on a more senior role because there's not as much travel. But I think you could be able to manage it in line with the principles that we will need to make sure that people are only going into the office for certain things rather than just going in the whole time to be seen and be present. I think we lose pay people on the journey otherwise.

**Interviewer:** What would you like your working arrangements to look like in the future?

**666:** I'm very clear on this. Two days working from home and one day in the office drinking coffee and chatting! You are laughing but I think we have all missed out on so much. Seriously though I would like it to be predominantly virtual. I think people should only really be in the office when they absolutely need to be there. Uh for certain situations, and I'm talking about big meetings, collaboration, etc. But I think the day of going back into the office just to sit in the office is definitely gone, thankfully.

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much for your insight. Is there anything else you would like to share in relation to your experience as a mother working remotely?

**666:** Nope you know, that's it. I am really interested in this topic though so I would really love if you could let me know how your study goes and maybe you could share your findings?

**Interviewer:** Sure, no problem. Thanks again.

*Appendix O: Data Analysis – Example of thematic analysis using Excel*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Code</b>
111	<i>I've had access to people I wouldn't have had access</i>	Access
111	<i>because its predominantly online I have greater accessibility to attend those all-important meetings</i>	Access
111	<i>I may not have been able to make important meetings in the different parts of the country because I would have needed to be home at a time to mind my children</i>	Access
111	<i>meetings that I would never have been in because it's been remote.</i>	Access
222	able to access people very quickly via teams, so the technology enabled that	Access
222	to deliver from any geographical location,	access
444	would never have been able to become my mentor if we hadn't embraced this remote approach as she lives on the other side of the country	Access
444	I would have never considered a job in another location within the business before remote working	Access
444	Before it would have always been well what can I do that's within close proximity to me, with a manageable commute.	Access
555	I wouldn't have been as open to new challenges or even new locations before moving to remote working as I wouldn't have been able to balance my responsibilities as a mother and as a professional in the way in which I would have liked.	Access
555	if this had happened in a non-remote environment, I wouldn't have been able to attend the meeting	Access
555	I also think that there are some opportunities on the portal that I wouldn't have considered before as I wouldn't have fancied the idea of relocating	Access
555	I wouldn't have been as open to new challenges or even new locations before moving to remote working	Access

*Appendix P: Organisational Permission to Conduct Study*

6<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Collette Darcy

Research Methods Office

National College of Ireland

Mayor Street Lower

International Financial Services Centre

Dublin 1

Dear Collette,

On behalf of Musgrave Wholesale Partners, I am writing to formally grant permission to Niamh Kennedy to undertake research at our organization.

Niamh's research will investigate the how women with children feel hybrid working may impact upon their career development. Niamh intends on conducting this research through interviewing approximately 10 mothers in the business.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me on

Kind regards,

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*Appendix Q: NCI Human Participants Ethical Review Application Form*

**National College of Ireland**

**Human Participants Ethical Review Application Form**

All parts of the below form must be completed. However in certain cases where sections are not relevant to the proposed study, clearly mark NA in the box provided.

Part A: Title of Project and Contact Information

**Name**

Niamh Kennedy

**Student Number (if applicable)**

X19926012

**Email**

X19926012@student.ncirl.ie

**Status:**

Undergraduate

Postgraduate

Staff

**Supervisor (if applicable)**

**Title of Research Project**

Will hybrid working positively impact upon women's career development or will it further widen gender disparities at leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland?

**Category into which the proposed research falls (see guidelines)**

**Research Category A**

Research Category B

Research Category C

**Have you read the NCI Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants?**

Yes

No

**Please indicate any other ethical guidelines or codes of conduct you have consulted**

**I have consulted my management in work for approval in line with our business code of conduct.**

**Has this research been submitted to any other research ethics committee?**

Yes   
No

If yes please provide details, and the outcomes of this process, if applicable:

**Is this research supported by any form of research funding?**

Yes   
No

If yes please provide details, and indicate whether any restrictions exist on the freedom of the researcher to publish the results:

Part B: Research Proposal

Briefly outline the following information (not more than 200 words in any section).

**Proposed starting date and duration of project**

4<sup>th</sup> January – exactly 4 months

**The rationale for the project**

**To understand the impact that hybrid working will have on women with children's career development in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland**

**The research aims and objectives**

**To explore the implications that hybrid working will have on the gender parity movement in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland**

**To understand how this will impact on women's career development opportunities at a leadership level in the wholesale and retail industry in Ireland**

**To create a dialogue around a more inclusive and accepting hybrid working environment for women with children in the wholesale and retail industry.**

### **The research design**

A qualitative approach will be employed in which participants will be interviewed in a semi structured manner.

### **The research sample and sample size**

**Please indicate the sample size and your justification of this sample size. Describe the age range of participants, and whether they belong to medical groups (those currently receiving medical treatment, those not in remission from previous medical treatment, those recruited because of a previous medical condition, healthy controls recruited for a medical study) or clinical groups (those undergoing non-medical treatment such as counselling, psychoanalysis, in treatment centres, rehabilitation centres, or similar, or those with a DSM disorder diagnosis).**

10 women with children at leadership level in the organisation I work for between the ages of 30 – 50 will be interviewed.

**If the study involves a MEDICAL or CLINICAL group, the following details are required:**

- a) **Do you have approval from a hospital/medical/specialist ethics committee?**  
If YES, please append the letter of approval. Also required is a letter from a clinically responsible authority at the host institution, supporting the study, detailing the support mechanisms in place for individuals who may become distressed as a result of participating in the study, and the potential risk to participants.  
If NO, please detail why this approval cannot or has not been sought.
- b) **Does the study impact on participant's medical condition, wellbeing, or health?**  
If YES, please append a letter of approval from a specialist ethics committee.  
If NO, please give a detailed explanation about why you do not expect there to be an impact on medical condition, wellbeing, or health.

**The nature of any proposed pilot study. Pilot studies are usually required if a) a new intervention is being used, b) a new questionnaire, scale or item is being used, or c) established interventions or questionnaires, scales or items are being used on a new population. If no such study is planned, explain why it is not necessary.**

Will pilot open ended questions on a candidate

**The methods of data analysis. Give details here of the analytic process (e.g. the statistical procedures planned if quantitative, and the approach taken if qualitative. It is not sufficient to name the software to be used).**

Data will be analysed using thematic content analysis

### **Study Procedure**

**Please give as detailed an account as possible of a participant's likely experience in engaging with the study, from point of first learning about the study, to study completion. State how long project participation is likely to take, and whether participants will be offered breaks. Please attach all questionnaires, interview schedules, scales, surveys, and demographic questions, etc. in the Appendix.**

Participants can engage in this study on a voluntary basis. The interview will take

### Part C: Ethical Risk

**Please identify any ethical issues or risks of harm or distress which may arise during the proposed research, and how you will address this risk. Here you need to consider the potential for physical risk, social risk (i.e. loss of social status, privacy, or reputation), outside of that expected in everyday life, and whether the participant is likely to feel distress as a result of taking part in the study. Debriefing sheets must be included in the appendix if required.** These should detail the participant's right to withdraw from the study, the statutory limits upon confidentiality, and the obligations of the researcher in relation to Freedom of Information legislation. Debriefing sheets should also include details of helplines and avenues for receiving support in the event that participants become distressed as a result of their involvement in this study.

A potential risk may be that the participants anonymity may be compromised – the researcher will take every precaution to ensure this doesn't happen.

**Do the participants belong to any of the following vulnerable groups?**  
(Please tick all those involved).

- Children;
- The very elderly;
- People with an intellectual or learning disability
- Individuals or groups receiving help through the voluntary sector
- Those in a subordinate position to the researchers such as employees
- Other groups who might not understand the research and consent process
- Other vulnerable groups

**How will the research participants in this study be selected, approached and recruited? From where will participants be recruited? If recruiting via an institution or organisation other than NCI please attach a letter of agreement from the host institution agreeing to host the study and circulate recruitment advertisements/email etc.**

They will be recruited selected from the organisation I work in – **letter of agreement attached (Appendix P)**

**What inclusion or exclusion criteria will be used?**

Participants must be a mother, in their 30-50s, and working in the wholesale and retail industry

**How will participants be informed of the nature of the study and participation?**

They will be informed through the organisation's communication page

**Does the study involve deception or the withholding of information? If so, provide justification for this decision.**

No

**What procedures will be used to document the participants' consent to participate?**

After explaining the research participants and the researcher will both sign to agree they comprehend what is involved. These signatures will be retained for the duration of the study and then destroyed in line with GDPR regulations.

**Can study participants withdraw at any time without penalty? If so, how will this be communicated to participants?**

Yes this will be explained to them when explaining research purpose

**If vulnerable groups are participating, what special arrangements will be made to deal with issues of informed consent/assent?**

N/A

*Please include copies of any information letters, debriefing sheets, and consent forms with the application.*

Part D: Confidentiality and Data Protection

**Please indicate the form in which the data will be collected.**

Identified       Potentially Identifiable       **De-Identified**

**What arrangements are in place to ensure that the identity of participants is protected?**

The research will not publish the organisation or participants names – pseudonyms will protect participants identities

**Will any information about illegal behaviours be collected as part of the research process? If so, detail your consideration of how this information will be treated.**

No

**Please indicate any recording devices being used to collect data (e.g. audio/video).**

The voice recorder on my mobile phone One Plus 8t

**Please describe the procedures for securing specific permission for the use of these recording devices in advance.**

Participants will sign a form to agree to having their views recorded for the purpose of the research and the research only.

**Please indicate the form in which the data will be stored.**

Identified       Potentially Identifiable      **De-Identified**

**Who will have responsibility for the data generated by the research?**

The researcher

Is there a possibility that the data will be archived for secondary data analysis? If so, has this been included in the informed consent process? Also include information on how and where the data will be stored for secondary analytic purposes.

No

If not to be stored for secondary data analysis, will the data be stored for 5 years and then destroyed, in accordance with NCI policy?

Yes

No

### **Dissemination and Reporting**

**Please describe how the participants will be informed of dissemination and reporting (e.g. submission for examination, reporting, publications, presentations)?**

Via email

**If any dissemination entails the use of audio, video and/or photographic records (including direct quotes), please describe how participants will be informed of this in advance.**

Via email

### Part E: Signed Declaration

I confirm that I have read the NCI Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants and agree to abide by them in conducting this research. I also confirm that the information provided on this form is correct.

**Signature of Applicant Niamh Kennedy**

**Date** 16/12/2021

**Signature of Supervisor (where appropriate):**

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Any other information the committee should be aware of?**

*Appendix R: Research Objectives and Related Themes and Sub-Themes*

<i>“An exploration of the extent to which remote working has contributed to the ‘Maternal Wall’ at leadership level, in the wholesale and retail industry, since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, in Ireland.”</i>		
<b>Research Objective</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
To investigate the effect working remotely has on woman with children’s working environment.	Remote work has had a positive effect on mother’s work environment	Access
		Focus
		Family Friendly/Wellbeing
		Future Work Environment
To establish if mother feel remote working arrangements contribute to the solidification of traditional gender roles?	Gender Roles	Maternal Wall
		Internal Maternal Wall
To investigate if remote working encourage a corporate culture of ‘presenteeism’ which detrimentally impacts mothers?	Presenteeism	Traditional Gender Roles
		Reversed Gender Roles
To explore the impact that remote working is having on women with children’s attitudes towards their own training, development, and promotion opportunities?	Training, development & promotion	Need for hybrid
		Concern for future
		Leadership
To ascertain whether the remote working conditions have enhanced the pervasiveness of the “maternal wall” in the wholesale and retail industry?	Maternal Wall	Training
		Development
		Promotion