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Research Question: Should Ireland  
adopt a Nordic approach of parental  
leave in supporting women balance  
career and motherhood?

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Date: 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2022

## Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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## **Abstract:**

This report investigates the research question relating to the balancing of motherhood and career. The argument presented is that this phenomenon cannot be integrated due to societal views and through legislation. This paper explores how a change in certain factors such as childcare and legislation can contribute to achieving this balance, a closer look into Ireland's legislative approach in comparison to the Nordic countries particularly Denmark. This report utilises a sample of a man and two women in senior or executive positions within the field of their careers. As Ireland is the context to be focused on in this research paper, it is obvious that the nation of Ireland has made notable progressive changes from its Constitution of the 1930's which stated that '*mothers should not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to neglect their duties in the home*' (Bunreacht na hÉireann 1937, Article 41.2.2). Naturally women were limited in their exploration of finding purpose outside the home which was linked to the strict traditional gender roles, religion and legislation echoed the limitation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Irish woman. This research paper will focus on the difficulties that professional women encounter especially deciding when to start a family, career breaks, receiving support from their partners and organizations. The methodology consists of three interviews; one Danish female who brought a different outlook leave legislation in Denmark, included her personal experiences, career development and family life. On the other hand, two Irish participants both male and female delivered vital information regarding their experiences in high powered careers, family-work balance and their hopes for Ireland's improvement and growth. The objective of the methodology is to shed light on the personal accounts of the two women interviewed on balancing career and motherhood and for the male interviewee an insight into the differences within professional men and women particularly relating to work-family balance and a potential change in Irish legislation.

## **Introduction:**

The phenomenon of balancing a career and parenting is an intriguing concept that has rose to prominence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Notably, Irish history from the mid twentieth century onwards women's rights outside the home became a huge topic of discussion within society and this caused women to discover life outside of the household. This signified their emergence into the workforce and what this change meant for society. Despite society driving the narrative of a woman's sole responsibility is to be a nurturer and homemaker, but women were interested in partaking in greater societal changes.

The introduction of the birth control pill can be ascribed as one of the major catalysts for women's emergence into the workforce. From this discovery, society has witnessed the immense growth and participation of women in the workforce over the past few decades but is yet to actively accommodate women through legislation particularly.

The hypothesis of this research is that women who are in the pursuit of career and motherhood cannot successfully balance the act of career progression and maintaining their position in the home. Generally, the societal belief is that either career or motherhood comes at the expense of the other in a woman's life. This phenomenon is quite complex, as literature Van Laar and Meeussen (2018) suggests that professional women may experience hardship relating to their mothering style due to social pressures.

There has been a great deal of research (Pianta , Nimetz and Bennet 1997) on the relationship between mother and child which determines educational and behavioural outcomes. Society recognises the impact of a mother's presence in the home, but the role of a father is underestimated, and attention should be given towards this. For centuries the concept of family has appeared to be primarily a woman's purpose and the desire to have a family; society claims to be an innate impulse for women with no exception and this claim appears to be one of the factors that affects a women career choice.

This research aims to identify the differences between Irish and Nordic legislation, the reality of professional women, the importance of fatherhood, career-oriented men and women and the childcare system. The topics researched for the literature review will pose as an



investigation of the underlying reasons why a revisitation of legislation is needful to occur. Often the reason behind why the phenomenon of successfully balancing career and motherhood is frowned upon is associated with the long-held beliefs of gender roles pertaining to men and women. Despite society's attempt to deviate from these beliefs, both present day women and men are negatively affected by them. These views assuredly affect women who are desirous of both a successful career and the opportunity to have a family, as these two intersect for modern day women.

## **Introduction to Literature Review:**

The review of literature outlines the difficulty surrounding this phenomenon such as, the traditional male and female archetypes, the legislative framework, and the external factor of childcare. The findings of the review are that juggling career and motherhood comes at a substantial cost and for women who are willing to interconnect the two must be aware of factors that contribute to the complexity of this phenomenon. Although literature handles the subject of juggling career and motherhood efficiently, this review aims to draw out the argument of the clear disparities that professional men and women encounter. Furthermore, with those disparities present would it be deemed necessary for legislation to improve and if an improvement to what extent is feasible. The literature review in this paper evaluates Irish women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; this section argues that the stance of the Irish State through religion and legislation towards women was a direct impediment on their citizenship.

The subtopic of opposing views argues that despite the phenomenon of career and motherhood appearing to be quite appealing to young women, the belief of ‘having it all’ is a misconception that young women need to acknowledge. Additionally, this serves to compare the archetypes of the career mother and the stay-at-home mother recognising the effects pertaining to a woman’s life. The review of the comparison of career-oriented men and women is prompted by the archetype of the career mother. The argument clarifies that both professional men and women endure a level of difficulty in relation to achieving a balance between career and family.

This research paper includes the subtopic of fatherhood, the key argument enforces that the role of fathers in the household should not be trivialised and through legislation fathers will feel the need to uptake leave to encourage stability in the parenting relationship. The father’s quota is a direct by-product of fatherhood and that argument evaluates the Nordic approach utilised to promote gender equality through improving leave legislation for fathers. A comparison is formed between Ireland and Denmark and this assessment aims to highlight areas of improvement for Ireland.

Moreover, the subtopic of Ireland’s legal stance of paternity leave argues that presently the legislative framework for fathers can be revisited to incite improvements in accommodating women in balancing their careers along with motherhood. This evaluates the initial interest

towards paternity leave upon introduction and how Ireland's membership in the EU contributed to its new egalitarian approach towards legislation.

Lastly, the key argument surrounding Ireland's childcare system is that factors such as cost and availability of childcare services negatively impact dual career families and single parent families, in which mothers are hugely affected by this. The Nordic model of childcare serves as a comparison to the Irish childcare system and therefore identifies potential improvements that link to the advancement of work-life balance for both mother and father.

### **Irish women in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Men and women possessed very precise roles in society, boundaries pertaining to women specifically within the context of family which entailed being dutiful to her husband, children, and religion. From a historical point of view motherhood has been equated to be a woman's entity basically inseparable from her nature Leskošek (2011). Motherhood was viewed to be the embodiment of femininity and it was not seen as conducive for a woman to survive outside the institution of marriage, where children constituted an integral part. Nowadays, progressive and systemic reforms have been established in a way that encourages people to plan and live their lives as they intend to. As for women, it is apparent that the engagement in the workforce is relatively high compared to a century ago.

Modern society has witnessed a rise in single parenthood and divorce in which a century ago would have appeared to be a fallacy. The lives of modern women are the opposite of women who lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the literature surrounding this timeframe illustrates how far the female gender have progressed explicitly within the Irish context. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, The Irish Constitution clarified its stance on the role and responsibility a woman holds in society stating that the family unit is defined as the '*natural primary fundamental unit group of society*', where women and mothers were addressed with having a specific purpose within the family unity (Bunreacht na hÉireann 1937, Article 41.1.1). The constitution also states that "*the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved*" (Bunreacht na hÉireann 1937, Article 41.2.1). Undoubtedly, the rights of women didn't exceed past the home, as legislation supported the establishment of this boundary, stating that '*mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to neglect their home duties*' (Bunreacht na hÉireann 1937, Article 41.2.2). The pervasiveness of the Catholic doctrine was viewed to possess a

stronghold in the lives of the Irish, as the assumptions made towards the role of women were reflected in the teachings of the church (Beaumont, 1997). Women were expected to carry out these teachings in their daily lives and these were displayed in her dedication to prioritising her children's upbringing and maintaining the wellbeing of the family. Literature proposes that the Irish State was quite adamant on their attitude and beliefs towards women and their engagements within society, which meant full servitude to the institution of family (Beaumont, 1997).

Acknowledging women's rights and equality led to the disgruntlement of many individuals who clearly outlined that they were against the involvement of women in public life. Women worked tirelessly, sacrificed their resources to fight for a better State. Groups such as the Cumann na mBan were established to support Ireland's march to independence, and these women fought diligently and sacrificed their resources to strive for a better nation. Furthermore, various male perspectives were put forth in an attempt to diminish the efforts of Cumann na mBan, with historians like P.S. O' Hegarty stated that *'women's work in the world should be identified with the things of life, but these ladies were busy with the things of death.'* (Brewster *et al* 1999, p.96). This statement is reflective of the need for women to return to their 'usual' roles as life givers, homemakers and submissive wives after the violent, bloody, and troublesome period following the war of independence. Nevertheless, many Irish men and women maintained the view that it was not strange that a woman would promote life through motherhood and marriage. The fact of the matter was that these roles pushed on women were utilised as a yardstick for women and certainly restricted them in their advancement within the public sphere.

Despite claims that Irish women in the nineteenth century were 'indoctrinated,' they utilized their citizenship rights to the fullest by establishing organizations such as the National Council of Women, which enabled Irish women to be active in society outside the home, which was not the norm at the time. These societies ensured that all women could avail of services such as education and training which also led to several women contributing to the maintenance of the agricultural industry (Brewster *et al*, 1999, p 96). From the 1940's onwards Irish women became even more desperate and relentless to make an impression within society.

There was a turning point in 1990 when Mary Robinson was the first female president elected to office in Ireland. Historians recognise this to be a crucial moment relating to the

progression and improvement of societal conditions for Irish women. Robinson reformed the narrative of Irish women from the description provided by the Taoiseach in which he stated that *'the woman is the homemaker, and everyone knows that there is little chance of having a home in the real sense if there is no woman in it, the woman is really the home-maker'* (Brewster *et al*, 1999 p.94).

Plainly, Irish leaders' attitude and belief towards of the role women played in society was strictly within the boundaries of the home until Robinson voiced that the Irish woman *'who instead of rocking the cradle, rocked the system, and who came out massively to make their mark on the ballot paper and on a new Ireland'* (Brewster *et al*, 1999,p.94). These words alone from Robinson defied the past societal views on women, as this statement came from a fellow woman assuredly led to the empowerment of many Irish women. According to this literary work, it was insinuated that the rights and expression of Irish women was of no urgency to society until a woman was elected to a position of power.

## Opposing Views:

Over the years different political ideologies have risen and therefore has had an influence on the choices of individuals. The two main opposing views are conservative and liberal. Many young modern women gravitate towards the liberal perspective of womanhood which promotes an oppressive and pessimistic view of the institution of family and to disregard gender distinctions between men and women. Crittenden (1999) gives us an insight into the dilemma that faces modern young women in her book 'What our mothers don't tell us'. In her book, she highlights that the conversation pertaining to the truth about a woman's body and nature is often avoided by society towards young women and this has been a problem from generation to generation. Crittenden (1999) stresses the idea that women ought to '*rediscover fulfilment*' which is a valid point as present-day society often promotes the idea that young women can have it all. In truth this idea is extremely far-fetched as for women, the phenomenon of career and motherhood has presented some alarming truths that women must come to terms with. Gretchen Livingston and D'Vera Cohn (2010) conducted a study concerning the situation of childlessness, where it was correlated with the rise of educational levels for women of all races and ethnicities.

This study by Livingston and Cohn (2010) highlights that the most educated of women are less likely to have children, prompting the obvious question of why this may be occurring. Undoubtedly to build a successful career, an investment in education is essential and would be of aid in attaining senior or managerial positions within an organisation. Education and career development cross-over into the peak fertility of a woman, which is likely the reason that women neglect starting families during this time which often leads to regret. This is a bitter truth that society must address and entertain an intelligent conversation on because as birth rates decline, the future population is left vulnerable.

Motherhood in the eyes of feminists is described as a '*servile and ultimately dangerous state for women to succumb to*' Crittenden (1999,p.111) which in turn has resulted in the dissatisfaction of modern women as maternal instincts are ignored and repressed. Therefore, women are left dissatisfied with the choice of neglecting their true nature and innate desires. Another study highlights mothers who utilise twelve weeks or less of maternity leave are at a higher risk of postpartum depression, as they're returning to the workplace while dealing with physical and emotional changes during this period (Kornfiend and Sipsma, 2018).

Time constraints are the primary contributing factor to the difficulty concerning a woman's return back to the workforce following maternity leave (Weis, 2015). This is due to the fact that there is less time to dedicate towards domestic duties, causing them to miss out on football games or keyboard lessons, bedtime and even the opportunity to prepare dinner. Lack of access to high-quality childcare is often cited as one of the numerous reasons why women continue to leave the workforce after childbirth.

Studies have revealed that up to 1.8 million out of 10 million children are in childcare services but commonly external family members such as grandparents look after the child Crittenden (1999). The outrage about the current climate of the childcare system is not what will solve the inadequacies that face women in balancing career and motherhood, however this doesn't mean that childcare can't be improved. Crittenden also draws on the experiences only a mother can relate to which counters the argument of proposing childcare as the solution, *'the woman who kisses her child's forehead in the morning before leaving for the office still harbours the agonizing suspicion that what her child needs most is her'* Crittenden (1999,p.121).

An interesting observation that Crittenden (1999) explores is that the prospect of divorce has made women remain in the workforce and not become stay-at-home mothers, whereas a generation ago this would've been unheard of. Modern women are aware of the implications of not being able to support oneself, even married women succumb themselves to employment despite their husbands falling into a high earning bracket. If a woman was assured that her husband would remain in the marriage with her, leaving the workforce would be an easy decision to make.

The opposing view of this is that women desire to work which is a comprehensible argument and of course not many women would like to take on the role of a 'traditional' mother or wife. However, a topic that must be addressed pertains to how employment can be managed around the lives of the children. The notion that working mothers find the office to be enjoyable and more rewarding than to suffer at home with their babies is a poor argument as children shouldn't be treated as burdens. When they are brought into this world, they deserve full attention, care and love Crittenden (1999).

Literature suggests for a revisitation of the priorities of modern women, evidently balancing career and motherhood comes at a substantial cost and it must be dealt with within the first thirty years of a woman's life contributes to its complexity. Motherhood is a valuable journey

that entails positive and negative experiences, but it certainly should not be showcased to young women that it is an experience that is worth neglecting completely Crittenden (1999).



## Career Oriented Men vs Career Oriented Women

Twenty-first century families have deviated from the standard nuclear family from the past century, which consisted of a patriarch figure who was solely the breadwinner and a matriarch who operated strictly within the home. Dual career families are defined by (1985) where both spouses are in pursuit of a continuous life-long career and desire to create and build a family life where which children are the by-product of. The term '*career*' refers to a position that requires a unique form of education and training, these positions entail extreme commitment and therefore the individual is usually in receipt of successive achievements, recognition, and promotion. Individuals who find themselves in the circumstance of a dual career family, despite their ideological beliefs are contributing to a radical change that is unfolding before society Gilbert (1985).

Men per say are also in receipt of advantages amidst societal change, as women have challenged the patriarchal system, the benefits do not solely affect women. For men this includes altering the definition of '*masculinity*' and tying it into a deeper emotional sense towards other men, children and to not become completely reliant on a career for self-worth Gilbert (1985).

From birth the expectation of men is to succeed, for them this translates to their work and affects their prestige, status, well-being, and self-worth Gilbert (1985). Generally, society has labelled men to be the breadwinners of the home, so the concept of dual career families resonates with women heavily as the phenomena of balancing career and motherhood is not as familiar to society from a historical standpoint. There has been research provided on the subject matter relating to working mothers and the challenges associated with their transition to motherhood (Rangel *et al*, 2018), but for men the little to no studies are available to promote a balance of profession and family. Simply, the married lives of men change minimally compared to women, as women bear the responsibility of childbearing which of course affects their career pursuit.

A shortcoming that dual career families experience between both genders concerns the ideology that are more than likely ready to compromise their career for family. Parker (2015) investigates the issue of women compromising their career progression and development for the sake of their family, which often pertains to the fact that gender roles are yet to come to

terms with the trends in the labour force. Currently, women make up almost half of the U.S labour force, however they devote more time on household work and childcare in comparison to men (Parker *et al*, 2013). A study revealed that working mothers spent 14.2 hours on average carrying out domestic duties, whilst fathers spent 8.6 (Parker and Wang, 2013). In relation to childcare, mothers devoted 10.7 hours per week while fathers spent on average 7.2 hours (Parker and Wang, 2013). The disparity between working mothers and fathers regards to their obligations within the home is rather alarming and should be questioned since society, particularly institutions such as organizations, claim that active support for working mothers is ongoing, but the numbers are not reflective. Perhaps, the reason for this can be ascribed to the nature of women, specifically the intense bond formed between a mother and child, which occurs from pregnancy to post delivery. Hahn-Holbrook, Schetter and Haselton (2012) explain that lactation is primarily responsible for the maternal behaviours in mammalian species as the release of oxytocin and prolactin result in maternal behaviour. Studies have suggested that plasma oxytocin levels amidst pregnancy and post-delivery have predicted an increase in maternal bonding such as eye-to-eye gaze, embodied movement and affectionate touch, which are all responsible for attachment (Hahn-Holbrook *et al*, 2012). This literature suggests that the formation of the attachment bond between mother and child, derives from breastfeeding which is immensely encouraged by physicians and potentially is the reason why mothers find themselves engaging more in childcare in comparison to fathers.

Hewlett (2002) addresses the inequities career-oriented women are prone to, revealing that 79% of professional men desired to have children and 75% have them already. On the other hand, professional women have a tough time finding suitable marriageable partners which often initiates the problem and affects up to 60 % of career driven women in the age group of 41-55 (Hewlett, 2002). This can potentially be disputed by the theory of evolution as literature alludes (Berezkei and Csanaky, 1995) that females prefer the aspect of wealth and status in a male, therefore cues such as a good profession, high income and ambition are sought after by females. Moreover, males prefer physical attractiveness in females regardless of status therefore cues such as youthfulness, healthy physical condition, and the capacity of reproductivity are valued amongst men.

Literature advocates that men overall encounter an easier experience in dual career families and women are the ones who evidently bear the brunt of this phenomena. Observing these differences in the experiences of career-oriented men and women sparks the conversation of whether men and women can operate in the same domains without acknowledging the

important role of biology and evolution as this influences the outcome of choosing life partners.

### **Fatherhood/Nordic Approach to Leave Legislation**

Generally, society has predominantly shown an interest particularly in the relationship between the mother and child therefore neglecting the role fathers play in that relationship too. (Misca and Smith, 2014) present that fathers and father figures possess an enormous impact on a child's development. Many researchers have come to different conclusions relating the father-child relationship, but it does not go unobserved that fathers contribute unique experiences towards their child's growth (Lewis and Lamb, 2003). Mothers and fathers undertake different play styles to their child. Whilst mothers appear to be more rhythmic with their style of play, fathers engage in physical play which also aids the child's development. The style of play, rough and tumble play, includes 'unstructured and wrestling style play which encourages the child's social competence and manages their usage of aggression (Lewis and Lamb, 2003). Fletcher *et al.* (2011) simplifies two theoretical formulations which links the physical play of fathers to child development that have been approved. The act of physical play with a parent grants an innocent and affective environment where a child can understand their emotional cues and express their emotions correctly. The evolutionary framework identifies that mothers and fathers possess differences that are biologically based and some culturally inclined. Fathers take on the role of opening up their children to the possible 'dangers' of the world by encouraging them to engage in unfamiliar incidences, expose themselves to obstacles and develop courage to overcome difficulties that are encountered during one's life journey Fletcher *et al.* (2011). The literature gathered on this subtopic from (Lewis and Lamb, 2003) and Fletcher *et al.* (2011), provides an in-depth analysis of the dynamic between father and child and the necessity for fathers to be encouraged to be present in home just as mothers are expected to do so. Research has acknowledged that there is not enough literature based on the relationship between father and child (Lewis and Lamb, 2003), this should spark an intelligent conversation within society to emphasise that fathers are needed in the home.

Over the years the topic of flexibility and work life balance pertaining to both men and women within contemporary organizations has received attention. According to Ellingsæter (2021) the parental leave rights of fathers have become a predominant topic relating to a

reform within leave policies, the notion of parental leave is concerned with parental employment, supporting gender equality and well-being of children. Ellingsæter (2021) notes that reforms within leave policies are prevalent, but the majority of countries are on similar paths which is reflected on different national stances towards childhood, motherhood, and fatherhood. However, there has been an increase in the number of policies enforced to encourage fathers to have more time on leave. This includes the non-transferrable leave granted to each parent which contributes to an increase in inclusivity regarding sharing responsibilities between both parents Ellingsæter (2021).

Furthermore, a new directive was initiated by the European Union to tackle the issue of work life balance between both genders. This directive targets the withstanding issue surrounding leave entitlement, as most fathers don't avail of parental leave; this resulted in the introduction of the one to two months period of non-transferrable parental leave (European Council, 2019)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2005) published a study titled '*Gender Equality and Decent work: Good Practices at the Workplace*' which presented that Norway grants the longest paid paternity leave after the birth of a child, whilst the mother is entitled to eleven months. The Norwegian government acknowledges the rights and entitlements relating to parental leave and pay compensation. The European Commission (2013) released the social security rights available in Norway which highlights the parental benefits of paid leave of 49 weeks which is covered by 100% of earnings. A parent is also entitled to uptake 59 weeks of leave but will be in receipt of a lower benefit of 80% of earnings will be covered (European Comission, 2013).

Denmark is a Nordic country that has not adopted the '*father's quota*' but utilises the shared parental leave appropriately and the uptake is higher than that of the Finnish (Haataja, 2009). Denmark's approach includes a combination of maternity and paternity benefit for 52 weeks, paternity leave is up to two weeks and must be utilised in the first 14 weeks of the child's birth and regarding the paid parental leave, 32 weeks are split between each parent. (European Commission, 2021)

## **Ireland's Leave Legislation**

This literary work aims to establish comparisons between Ireland and the Nordic countries on the subject of leave legislation. It is essential that Ireland's progression towards implementing paternity and parental leave is highlighted. A turning point came for Ireland as the state succumbed to membership of the EU in 1973. The Irish government stated that *'membership will enable us to participate fully with other democratic and like-minded countries of Europe in the movement towards European unity based on ideals and objectives to which we as a nation are ready to subscribe'* (1972 Irish Government White Paper on Europe cited in Department of Foreign Affairs. ((DFA), 2022).

Rush (2009, pp. 12-13) states that EU membership broadened the social modernisation of Ireland. A State which was once heavily influenced by Catholicism became openly tolerant of egalitarian policies particularly from the Swedish. An important idiom that was focused on implementing reform was *'familisation'* which was defined as the *'fusion of childhood into the institution of family defining children as extension of their parents'* Rush (2009, p. 12). This implied that the Irish Constitution needed to be evaluated to support the concept of *'familisation'* as it was evident that the influence of Catholic teachings was strongly reflected in the Constitution. In turn the Government founded the Constitution Review Group, whose aim was to nullify the catholic doctrines within the Irish Constitution Rush (Rush, 2009).

Paternity leave and benefit were introduced in 2016, which consists of two weeks leave and two weeks benefit Department of Justice ((DOJ), 2016). The Tánaiste stated that *'the new act is also a clear indicator of this governments commitment to investing in children's early years, and to improving work life balance of parents'* ((DOJ), 2016).

On the introduction of paternity leave, the take up rate was quite lower than expected and the primary reason for this occurrence was due to the lack of occupational top ups as the benefit only replaced up to 53% of the average net income (Köppe, 2019) . Contrastingly, Sweden introduced *'the daddy's quota'* in 1995 and take up was at a notably high rate of 70%, whilst majority of Swedish fathers could avail of occupational top ups which warranted a replacement of 90% of wages in the first 30 days or 60 days Köppe (2019).

Furthermore, the implementation of parental leave occurred initially in 2019, which consisted of 5 weeks of leave and benefits for parents (European Commission, 2021). Evidently, in forming a comparison with Denmark and Norway, Ireland has the least amount of parental leave available for its citizens. Ireland's membership in the EU has influenced an improvement in parental leave legislation as the Department of Social Protection ((DSP), 2022) announced the increase of parental leave and benefits from 5 weeks to 7 weeks.

Evidently, literature suggests that Ireland is revising its approach to leave legislation to support gender equality and work-life balance. DSP (2022) noted that the number of parents taking parental leave and benefits has tripled since the year 2020, and the ministers are committed to significantly extending the leave and benefit in the upcoming years. Prior to the progressive reforms made within Irish legislation, Ray (2008) provides an insight whereby initially fathers received no guaranteed paternity leave. Regarding parental leave, each couple was entitled to 14 weeks of unpaid non-transferrable leave.

Research reviews the timeline of the Irish State, evidently Ireland's membership of the EU has birthed numerous benefits surrounding the improvements of its legislative framework. Through the States Constitution, a family focused approach was incorporated to ensure the institution of family was protected through Catholicism, nevertheless accommodated families who did not necessarily conform to the image that was upheld by the Church (Rush, 2009).

### **Ireland's Childcare System:**

Childcare is a universal problem that is often criticised for contributing to the gender gap and the hardship women experience in balancing career and motherhood. This issue gained significance when women entered the workforce and equality amongst the genders became desired. Ireland is yet to recognise that it's shift in labour trends must be accommodated as over the years the involvement of married women's participation has expanded dramatically with enormous effects on children.

The participation grew specifically for women between the ages of 25-34 and with these women having young children childcare became of utmost importance Davis (2007) mentions a phenomenon that took the world by storm which is the large number of women represented in the academics, third level education in particular and this has led economists to believe this will have a dynamic impact on the workforce and will push employers to retain their high performing women Davis (2007). Women's participation intertwines with women's fertility rates, whereby the trend has encountered a significant decrease in fertility across Europe. Ireland has not been left behind in this trend as the crude birth rate has declined from 1965 with a rate of 22.1 to 2004 with a figure of 15.2 (Eurostat, 2006)

Within the Nordic countries, for example, Denmark possesses a high total fertility rate at 71.4% whilst Danish women are actively involved in the workforce and this trend appears to be rampant across the Nordic countries and this can be partially accredited to the implementation of the father's quota and of course their childcare system (Eurostat, 2006). Barnados and Start Strong (2012) state that the reason why the Nordic countries scored highly in childcare is due to the investment of 1% GDP made towards early services. It is integral that all citizens have access to affordable early childhood and after-school programmes, as this may contribute to the decrease in child poverty.

For Ireland, the standard of early care services is deemed to be variable, but access and the factor of cost effectiveness are to be re-evaluated, as families with young children are heavily affected by this. Firstly, the cost of early care services is a significant challenge that has an impact on parents taking up employment, especially mothers. Irish mothers have voiced their concerns about this issue and have admitted to experiencing a loss of identity (Molloy, 2022). Amongst European countries, Ireland's cost of childcare services is one of the highest as

between 12- 20% of net income is contributed towards childcare (O'Doherty, 2018). The price of childcare ranges between 745 to over 1,000 euros (Fegan, 2019). Some families with younger children are not in receipt of support with childcare costs besides child benefit which would not be substantial to use for childcare. Minimum wage jobs are not sufficient to cover the cost of the early services, and this particularly affects single parent families.

Ireland's investment in afterschool services has been underdeveloped, as there is no framework, policies or procedures surrounding this and the training and qualifications possessed by staff varies while volunteers and funding are heavily relied on (Barnados and Start Strong, 2012). Literature suggests that numerous benefits are associated with the participation of young children in afterschool services such as the provision of enriching prospects such as dance, reading and homework clubs (Barnados and Start Strong, 2012). This certainly contributes to their socialization i.e., behavioural patterns and the development of personalities which is of utmost importance as they mature into their adolescents.

The Irish Government have addressed the issue surrounding childcare and believe reform can be implemented. Funchion (2022) discloses that Dáil Éireann has recognised the high cost of childcare and the effects it has had on the livelihood of citizens such as decisions regarding the return to the workplace and financial pressure. Dáil Éireann notes the inadequate funding towards early childcare services and calls for the government to increase public investment which will encourage service providers to reduce their fees (Funchion, 2022).

Literature incites that Ireland is addressing the issue surrounding the cost and availability of childcare, evidently the Nordic model can be mirrored by Ireland as it is quite clear the policies are family friendly and further promotes work-life balance.



### **Conclusion of Literature Review:**

The literature reviewed in this section aims to address the timeline of the Irish State and the clear progressive changes that have been implemented over the years relating to childcare and legislation. It is quite clear from the literature reviewed that Ireland has adapted to modern societal changes and the State continues to seek reform for the betterment of its citizens. The composition of studies reviewed enables for further research to occur, as a solid conclusion could not be presented from the subtopics. This field of study is essential as its centre concern is the institution of family. The family functions as one of the bases for the development of society and it is beneficial that the literature surrounding this research question is studied and promoted.

### **Research Question, Hypotheses and Objectives:**

*‘Should Ireland adopt a Nordic approach of parental leave to support women in balancing career and motherhood?’* is the research question chosen for this study.

The significance of this study is that it will provide an insight into Ireland’s current legislation surrounding parental leave and how a Nordic approach may be adopted within the Irish context. Irrespective of their income or educational background, an Irish professional woman may still juggle three responsibilities which include child rearing, domestic activities, and office work. For professional working women aspects of life are often neglected such as maintaining a healthy diet, adequate exercise and sleep which could eventually lead to burnout. These women cannot seek career advancement effectively as they don’t have time to remain informed about their career prospects within their field and often these women end up discontinuing their career progression due to loss of experience during maternity leave.

There were various hypotheses held prior to this research. The first hypothesis proposed that Ireland’s legal stance on parenthood was efficient and working mothers and fathers were able to be substantially present during the early stages of their child’s growth. Additionally, young women are often fed erroneous information about professional women and having it all and coming to terms with reality i.e., the importance of family. This ensures that motherhood can be explored conveniently as it certainly shouldn’t be a trade-off and of course acknowledging the biological clock.

This research topic encourages a potential revisitation to Ireland’s legal context in supporting the career development and progression of new mothers, ensuring and encouraging fathers to take up paternity leave to promote the balance of parenting within the home and for the necessity of both parents for the development and growth of their child(ren).

## **Methodology:**

The methodology utilised for this piece of research will be qualitative research. Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis (2015) explain that qualitative research is linked to interpretivist philosophy indicating that researchers need to highlight and interpret the subjective and socially constructed explanations produced by those included in the study. The reason why qualitative research was incorporated into this research investigation is because this style of research is dynamic and therefore contributes to the overall discussion surrounding the research question. Semi Structured interviews were best suited for this approach to encourage the collection of open-ended data. A recent study carried out in 2019 explores the vitality of following the principles of good interviewing such as good listening, refraining from stating personal opinions and practicing confidentiality which were all followed in carrying out each interview Quinlan *et al.* (2019). This research investigation produced descriptive results to support the style of the research question.

The reason why the methodology included a female Danish participant is to gain further insight into Denmark's approach and to utilise her personal experience providing open ended data. As this research question entails the phenomenon of balancing career and motherhood by the inclusion of this participant, an understanding of difficulties associated with professional women will support the context explored by Hewlett (2002). The European Women on Boards ((EWOB), 2021) Denmark and Irish legislation differs, and it is evident that the benefits of this are Danish women are highly represented in the workforce and the introduction of the lengthy parental leave encourages men to take up thus providing stability to the home. This contributes to steadiness of career-family balance for women.

The desired information to gather surrounding this research question is to identify clear distinctions between the experiences of the Irish participants and the Danish participant. This refers to the literature review as the interview included questions pertaining to the research subtopics such as leave legislation, childcare and the discrepancies between both professional men and women. The interviews conducted will support the research by furthering the current knowledge expressed towards this topic and would therefore encourage this research to be investigated in the future.

**Philosophical assumptions:**

This work and this piece of research are interpretive by nature because each participant comes from a different background. The two female interviewees will produce different outlooks in relation to the legislative framework and the differences between career-oriented men and women. The interviews are the main source of data collection; therefore the outcome will be that personal accounts will be provided by the participants.

**Ontological position:**

Presently in Ireland, there is a clear disparity of the expectation of mothers between both their working life and family life and that appears to be similar for men. Furthermore, the nature of reality for those two positions can have a huge effect positively for men as they will experience career progression quite smoothly in comparison to women who may encounter the opposite in pursuing career development whilst being mothers. This research question hopes to cause an inward look into Ireland's current approach, as it is clear that this current climate has witnessed the high involvement of women in the workforce as well as education.

The Irish perspective necessitates the adoption of these new considerations. Ireland is a country that is performing inadequately compared to other European countries. However, the country has come far from neglecting men entirely in relation to paternity leave and presently granting a maximum of two weeks for leave.

**Research Design:**

List of Participants:

Pseudonym	Discipline	Gender	Years of Service
Arthur (Irish)	Senior Manager	Male	20
Nora (Danish)	Senior BI Specialist	Female	10
Tara (Irish)	Business Partner/ People and Programs Manager	Female	20

The basis of these interviews will permit an interpretive paradigm for the reader, as each participant possesses a unique portfolio, operates in different career fields, differing years of service and of course gender. All these factors will serve as a solid foundation in identifying similarities and contrasts between each experience of the participants. This will further the investigation by addressing topics such as the dissimilarities between professional men and women, the utilisation of childcare services for both men and women during career progression and the fundamental perceptions of the roles mothers and fathers play in the lives of their children.

In analysing the interviews, a thematic approach will be utilised. The key words will be parental leave, career, motherhood, childcare, and balance. These keywords are selected as they are the main topics of discussion for the interviews and will give a vivid insight into why the research question is investigated.

### **Sampling:**

These participants are included for the methodology primarily because they are parents, thus can discuss through experience the state of legislation within their residing countries. An Irish male participant was involved in broadening the research particularly in relation to fatherhood and legislation. It is anticipated that this may contribute to gaining answers to the research question.

Arthur has been building his career for over 20 years, is married and has two children. From this information, it is guaranteed that a fresh perspective will be the outcome of this interview.

Nora, the participant providing the Danish perspective is also vital to the process, as she resides in one of the Scandinavian countries. This will provide a contrasting view to the Irish female participant, who carries an exclusive experience and will present further answers to the research question.

Lastly, Tara is a Business Partner and People and Programs Manager for a large and well renowned organisation and has two children. Her perspective intends to provide a contrast to that of the Danish participant as the participants are both career-oriented mothers, who both have numerous years of experience in their career fields. From including this contrast, a difference in experience through legislation will be explored.

**Questions:**

The themes that each question posed to the participants attempts to explore is the situation of parental/paternity leave in both Denmark and Ireland, the experiences of professional men and women and how that may translate into their journey towards motherhood and fatherhood. As mentioned above, each question asked will warrant a different response and therefore clear distinctions will be drawn out to aid an understanding surrounding the reason behind the research question. See Appendix A for the full list of questions.

**Ethics:**

For this piece of research all participants from the interviews are made anonymous and all steps have been taken to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees. Furthermore, consent forms have been signed which outlined the nature of the study and the necessary protocols that will be observed. Qualitative research faces certain challenges relating to confidentiality that includes sampling, research design and analysing the information gathered from the participants. It is paramount that all participants are informed of the type of the methodological approach used to ensure the investigation is successful.

**Limitations:**

Beginning research and sourcing literature to support my investigation was found to be uncomplicated as there are numerous pieces of research providing information of women and their career experiences. Relating to the literature on Irish legislation and its impact on women's employment in the Irish labour market appeared to be difficult in sourcing specifically within library books as information was found via internet resources.

As the research question handles the topic of career and motherhood, potentially in searching for subjects to participate in the interviews the limitations encountered are that due to the nature of the subject discussed individuals declined the opportunity to converse about this topic.

As the world experienced a pandemic that resulted in the use of face masks, restrictions relating to traveling and face to face meet ups, this served as a restriction to the methodology as the opportunity to meet in person to discuss this research became doubtful. This led to the use of alternative means of technology to tackle this issue in carrying out the interviews, i.e.

Google Meet was the medium used essentially. Nevertheless, technical issues were encountered such as sound issues, meeting time arrangements which were encountered with the Danish participant due to different time zones.

Moreover, attempting to come to an agreement with the participants served as a limitation for this piece of research, as evidently all the participants work with busy schedules on a weekly basis. This served as a time limitation, as this piece of work has a deadline in place so the delay in responses to suitable times and dates caused quite a strain on meeting draft deadlines.

## **Analysis/ Findings:**

*Subject: Missing out on their child's development.*

Arthur, Nora, and Tara all admitted to failing to be present for some aspects of their child's development due to the nature of their job, which was a response that was expected mainly from the two female participants due to pursuing career and motherhood which comes at a substantial cost; however, literature does support this. When the male participant mentioned that he also struggled with work-family balance, this suggested that research needs to assess the concept of work-life balance for professional men. Society often expects men to transition smoothly into the role of fathers therefore the assumption that career and family is an easy balance for men may not be entirely true. From literature the formative years of a child are between the ages of 1-5 which means that during these years their personality is developed, they're learning how to socialise and therefore developing emotional intelligence (Perkkurnaz, 2018). This statement alone presents that Ireland is still yet to accommodate families by revisiting their legislative framework.

Flexible working practices is a theme that is derived from this subject and two of the participants touched on this. Firstly, Nora's partner works in a start-up company, which eases her transition to motherhood as his flexibility allows him to spend quality time with their son. Evidently, flexibility for parents reduces the occurrences of failing to be present during their formative years. In addition, Arthur integrates working from home as a means for him to actively participate in his children's lives particularly in the morning and evenings. For dual-career families, parents are bound to miss out on their children's lives, in which he acknowledges however, he recognises his children's growth from attending to them. He notes that they're able to socialise with other children and this aids and shapes their experiences as children.

*Subject: Career oriented fathers and mothers.*

Arthur explains that his wife, who is a career-oriented woman, claims there is a 'male privilege' surrounding professionalism in the workplace that extends to the family. Her occupation as a communications manager validates that claim, Arthur agrees and explains that mothers usually are the ones to sacrifice their work if a child is sick or uptake household



responsibilities in between work hours. He voices that due to his seniority in the organisation, meetings often take up his schedule and leave no room for him to carry out such actions, as his wife. Nevertheless, Arthur acknowledges the male privilege in this aspect but also strives for a balance between childcare and domestic duties in his home. The work family-balance appears to be simplistic for males according to the interviewee, but he voices that for working mothers there's a difficulty in distancing oneself when a child becomes sick due to the maternal instinct in women.

#### *Subject: Fertility*

Fertility is an interesting subtopic that relates to this research and all the participants didn't shy away from voicing their outlooks on the subject matter. The Danish interviewee, Nora recognised amongst her colleagues that a lot of women had postponed pregnancy and encountered difficulty with their fertility journey. Literature suggests that the peak fertility of a woman begins from her late teenage years to her late twenties and after that period fertility begins to decline drastically. Silver *et al.* (2021) undertook a study and concluded that family is the primary source of meaning for numerous individuals across the world. This piece of research also indicates that despite building careers women are more likely to select family as a source of meaning. Furthermore, organisations should treat the topic of fertility with utmost attention and seriousness and create a space where women can discuss this with their managers.

Sohrab and Basir (2020) report on the issue of infertility, the impact it has on women in the workplace and the different approaches employers can use to incorporate it into their culture to ensure women have a safe space to discuss this topic. Nora provides an example of a friend who was pregnant and in desperate need of securing a job, but the interview process was extremely stressful and caused her to suffer a miscarriage. This is an example that possibly resonates with numerous women, who are seeking career development but often miss out on opportunities as the combination of pregnancy and career progression can be quite overwhelming.

Arthur, the male participant utilised in this study, strongly believes that family is an important aspect of life and is the reason why our species has been around for so long. He labels Irish employers as supportive as when employees announce that they are focusing on their fertility journey, employer's provide support by reducing workload on employees or simply by engaging in conversation to showcase their care and encouragement.

### *Subject: Childcare*

In balancing career and motherhood, many dual-career families opt into childcare to allow both parents to continue with career progression. All the participants admitted to engaging in childcare services. Often childcare is viewed to be quite negative for a child's growth as literature suggests that children that come from advantaged homes, have a lower cognitive achievement if they are in receipt of non-parental care than their peers who are in parental care (Perkkurnaz, 2018). Nevertheless, on investigating this subject all participants spoke on the positives surrounding childcare that they have noticed in their children's growth. Tara, the Irish participant, spoke quite highly of her experience with childcare as a working mother of two boys. At the time, her husband worked abroad so childcare was inevitable. She recalls that her sons outperformed their peers academically as even the crèche teachers were amazed at this and encouraged her to continue with this method. Tara also voices that she instilled the morals and values she upholds as an individual in her children and that contributed to their success in creche and beyond.

Arthur explains that he and his wife incorporated childcare for his two children, but he believes the cost of childcare within Ireland needs to be addressed as he explained the expenses, he puts towards childcare is up to 1,100 euros per child. He admits that his wife made the decision to avail of the use of childcare services to improve her balance with career and motherhood. However, the cost of the services made him question if two working parents in the household are worth having someone else look after your children.

### *Subject: Leave Legislation*

From the overarching research question, leave legislation is simply a catalyst in bringing about change within the Irish society in acknowledging the change in the family dynamics of the Irish family over the past century. Nora, the Danish participant outlined her experiences with the legislative framework of paternity leave and how she would prefer that the certain number of days given to the father were not taken away if he could not avail of them. Barrett (2022) states that this legislation issued in eleven weeks per parent and are non-transferrable enforces fathers particularly to utilise this period to bond with their new-borns.

In relation to Irish leave, Arthur and Tara provide an interesting glimpse into their experience on the effects that leave legislation has had on their work-life balance. Arthur believes Ireland has a long way to go in accommodating women in balancing their careers and motherhood. He highlights the Swedish and Norwegian models as the benefits associated with it include the lengthened split leave between both parents. From this, a close bond between children and their fathers are formed as often it's easier for fathers to become distant because they don't possess the role of nurturers as mothers do. For Ireland, Arthur expresses his understanding that organisations play a huge role in ensuring the enforcement of this perspective as the government incentive currently in place grants fathers 200 euro a week, but the uptake seems to be quite low due to the lack of a top up replacement set in place by some organisations. This indicates that fathers may struggle in deciding to choose to embark on leave, as this incites the conversation to potentially occur between organisations and the Irish Government to encourage a work-life balance for fathers.

Tara, the mother of two boys, reflects on her experience with legislation and states that from the time her children were born, Ireland's legal stance on leave has drastically improved. As her husband was working abroad, the incentive of paid leave was made available to her which contributed to her sustaining a balance between her career and motherhood. This led her to take time off work to care for her children whilst her husband supported her financially. Tara addresses Ireland's current state and recognises its different efforts made available to parents as in the past the likes of paternity leave and extended leave weren't available whilst organisations are striving to support employees by introducing family incentives.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Firstly, the bias upheld as a researcher undergoing an investigation of this research topic was that the idea that a woman's career and her active pursuit of becoming a mother cannot be successfully entwined. Choosing motherhood brings about many sacrifices which include reducing work hours or even potentially becoming a stay-at-home mother and providing the best childcare possible. Primarily studies have been provided relating specifically to the field of medicine, which has highlighted the impact of a career in medicine as having a negative effect on their family and relationships Hoffman *et al*, (2020) .As a researcher investigating and reading literature provided, the research addressed both angles of the arguments and appeared to be quite inconclusive. Moreover, this research holds the bias that the complexity that comes with balancing career and family mainly pertains to women and therefore outlines that the role fathers play in bringing stability in the home is essential in furthering the study of this research question.

The expected answer in tackling this investigation was that Ireland can simply adopt a different approach to parental leave, specifically that of the Nordic countries, but there are numerous factors that must be considered to implement this change. In gathering raw data, one aspect that initially wasn't taken into consideration on interviewing the Danish participant was the disadvantage of the enforced leave as it neglects the employment circumstances of families. On researching the structure of parental leave within the Nordic countries, the results appeared to produce positive results for women. The European Women on Boards ((EWOB), 2021) states that Denmark ranked seventh place for the gender diversity index amongst nineteen EU countries and has the third highest scores for female CFOs, where up to 43% of entities have 40% of women operating within their boards. In comparison to Ireland, which is ranked tenth amongst nineteen EU countries and notably scores lower than the European average for females working on committees and boards ((EWOB), 2021). Evidently, the Nordic countries appear to be thriving in gender equality by the implementation of the lengthened parental leave which serves to benefit society significantly.

The significance of the findings from this research allows for a potential conversation not only amongst legislative makers but also society. From engaging in these interviews, the information provided from both participants illustrates the state of legislation specifically

within the nation of Ireland as the research question of this paper focuses on. As the methodology of this paper is qualitative research, this elaborates the need for reflection on long held beliefs towards gender roles within our society and the need for a reform to occur and that should be reflected within the legislative context.

On interviewing the Danish participant, the findings from the interaction were insightful and thought provoking, as the participant showed a huge interest in this topic of research.

Immediately, motherhood was voiced by the female participants to be of utmost importance and their journey to motherhood which included learning, adapting, and evolving with each stage it brought is of great value in the life of both women. This led to the identification of a correlation from literature suggesting that having families and investing time and effort in caring for them is the main source of meaning in the lives of individuals across the globe Silver *et al* (2021).

Literature has presented both sides of the argument pertaining to women about the issues that come with juggling careers and family life such as failing to be present during the early years of their child's life Weis (2015). All participants revealed that they essentially neglected certain aspects of their children's lives such as school runs, the opportunity to prepare and eat lunch or dinner as a family due to the long hours and the responsibility that comes with their positions in the workplace. Therefore, this viewpoint encourages the need to delve deeper, beyond the research question and ask the question of whether women will be able to separate themselves from the specific roles and responsibilities that arguably come with motherhood. As literature has presented undeniable truths about the obligatory actions that a new mother must take during the early stages of a child's life, those actions cannot be substituted with that of the father due to the biological nature of women (Hahn-Holbrook *et al*, 2012).

The notion of a traditional woman carries some negative connotations and the same could be said about the idea of a career woman. These archetypes often conflict with each other as the latter is heavily criticised. Family appears to be the common denominator amongst these two archetypes, as this research paper focuses on how women in society believe that the duties of a mother cannot be entwined with duties in the workplace. In investigating this, both female participants strongly voiced that this can be balanced but of course by utilising resources such as childcare in which both women claimed to have availed of while building their careers in which they found to be of great use.

Unexpected outcomes have been identified within this piece of research, as literature above forms a comparison between Ireland and the Nordic Countries concerning childcare costs. The Irish system of childcare has been deemed expensive and not ideal for single parent households Barnados and Start Strong (2012) as even the data found during the interview process supports this claim. The Irish participants claimed childcare expenses ranged from 900 to over 1,000 euro. Investigating the Danish system, the participant explained shockingly that childcare was also costly, as for one child would cost 4264 Danish Kroner; converted to euro that would be just over 500 euro. As a researcher that piece of information allowed for the questioning of whether the comparison between the Scandinavian countries and Ireland is exactly well constructed as Ireland and Denmark's childcare system is costly. Nonetheless, a notable difference is the investment made by the Danish government towards the constant upkeep of services for early years and up to twelve years of age (Barnados & Start Strong, 2012).

The hypothesis of this research paper was proven to be wrong as both female participants are working examples of balancing their careers and along with motherhood. In doing so, both participants boldly admitted to using external sources for support such as childcare as their partners were also engaged in full-time work. Certain factors mentioned by the female participants such as childcare, reducing working hours, omitting social interactions, or even neglecting physical care for one's body must all be used sacrificially to ensure that their children have a present mother. As the hypothesis stated that the long-held beliefs towards specific gender roles would serve as an obstacle to women in pursuit of balancing career and motherhood, this was also proved to be wrong as the participants discussed their journey to motherhood. They both mentioned their partners strong presence post pregnancy and on returning to the workplace. Notably, gender roles for Irish men and women have changed drastically from the 20th century onwards and of course for the better.

To conclude, the phenomenon of balancing a career and motherhood has commanded the attention of society at large. It appears that the nation of Ireland is capable of adopting a Nordic approach to parental leave to encourage women to balance career and motherhood efficiently. Other than the legislative aspect of the ongoing problem surrounding this phenomenon is childcare services. Fortunately, the Irish Government has recognised that this is an ongoing issue that has negatively impacted family dynamics as well as life choices relating to career decisions. Ireland's membership in the EU has granted numerous benefits in permitting Ireland to incorporate egalitarian approaches in accommodating families presently. Globally, the cost of living is rising and the need for dual incomes within a household has become crucial. Society is conscious of women's growth in employment and the reality of becoming a career-oriented mother. In recognising the difficulties that pertain to professional women, society evidently would benefit a great deal by achieving accessible childcare and introducing legislation that is family friendly. This research paper provides enlightenment for young women on the phenomenon of balancing a career and motherhood. Many young women are desirous of building careers and excelling within their career fields, but the realisation that often comes with their decision to embark on the journey of motherhood is that the attention required from family may impede career progression. The decision to choose career over family or family over career is a unique decision that is not simplistic for women to make. The latter decision provokes the question concerning whether 'if women are leaving the workplace upon becoming mothers, can a further reform of legislation or childcare truly bring an end to the discussion surrounding motherhood and career?'. Significantly, this study serves to be an interpretive piece to further the investigation surrounding this research topic. As society continually evolves this topic will remain of importance in promoting gender equality and work-family balance.

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## **Appendix A**

### Questions:

Q1. Name, Location and Job Occupation? - by asking the participants this question it sets the tone of the interview to be conversational and introduces the background of the interviewee regarding their job position, qualifications, and career field.

Q2. Describe your journey to motherhood and any potential trade-offs? - this question reflects a partial part of the research question which pertains to balancing career and motherhood. The participants will be able to share their unique experience about their journey and perhaps particular adjustments that affected their balance of career and motherhood.

Q3. What support did you receive during maternity leave specifically from your company and domestically? This question was asked to receive an understanding of how the participants were treated during their maternity leave, were they in receipt of any benefits, did they also receive support domestically. From this question an insight is gained into how gender roles are perceived in the workplace and the home.

Q4. Thoughts on leave legislation in Ireland & Denmark?

This question will provoke different answers from all participants as Ireland's paternity and maternity leave laws differ to that of Denmark. As this question relates to a huge segment of research, this question probes the acknowledgement of possible contrasts in legislation which feeds into subtopics like childcare, father's role in parenting and career progression as a new mother.

Q5. After having children and seeking career progression did you feel you missed out on certain aspects of your child's growth and development?

As the above discusses the hardship professional women face, by asking this question it will grant practical and relatable answers which effectively will provide the investigation with answers that will further prove the importance of early childcare provided by both parents. This question may also probe the idea of if career and motherhood can be successfully balanced which will feed into the different archetypes of career mom and stay at home mom.

Q6. How has other aspects of your life changed when you became a mother? In asking the participant this question seeks to gain an understanding of possible negatives as well as positives that come with the journey of motherhood and if that translates into their occupation in the workplace

Q7. Advice for young women leaving university, seeking career development/progression who also are desirous of motherhood? By asking this question this relates to the style of methodology utilised in this investigation, which is interpretive, this will be of an advantage to the reader to gain an insight into reality for women who are in pursuit of balancing their career and journey to motherhood.

Q8. Thoughts on organizations speaking with employees about the topic of fertility. As research above discusses the implications of being a professional and fertility issues are a huge issue associated with that, this question serves to pose a dig at organizations to enforce this topic into conversation to promote a healthy work-family.

Male Participant:

Q1. How would you describe your career journey, progression and would you say on becoming a father that was hugely impacted or would you say it remained the same? By asking the interviewee this question a greater understanding will be granted in relation to the differences professional men and women face.

Q2. Thoughts on Ireland's paternity leave, do you think Ireland should adopt a Nordic approach in relation to leave to support women in balancing career and motherhood. This question will incite an opinion on Ireland's current state and identify possible solutions and changes to be made to encourage men in taking up more leave.

Q3. How is your work-family balance, would you describe it to be quite simplistic/ do you engage in household duties, supporting your wife in balancing her career? This question pits the two arguments of professional men having an easier experience in the workplace and at home while women don't. This question seeks to understand the differences and why these occur.