

National College of Ireland

Project Submission Sheet

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Programme: MSC Business Administration **Year:** ...2024.....

Module: Dissertation.....
.....

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Submission Due Date: ...10/08/2024.....

Project Title: ... **To investigate whether the career progression of women in the *Irish Civil Service* is conducted fairly and equitably**

Word Count:19,000.....

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To investigate whether the career progression of women in the Irish Civil Service is conducted fairly and equitably

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Name: Kate Byrne_____

Student Number: __x22115706_____

Degree for which thesis is submitted: MCS Business Administration____

Title of Thesis: *To investigate whether the career progression of women in the Irish Civil Service is conducted fairly and equitably.*

Date: _____10th August 2024_____

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MSCMGMT

Title of dissertation

“To investigate whether the career progression of women in the Irish Civil Service is conducted fairly and equitably”.

Name: Kate Byrne

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Date: 10th August, 2024.

Acknowledgments

I would like to firstly thank my supervisor, Bronwyn McFarlane, for her support and guidance throughout this project.

I would like to extend my thanks to everyone who has helped me during my studies at the National College of Ireland, from the teaching faculty who have shared their expertise and to my peers “MSC Talkers” whose engagement and discussions made our online lectures, informative and enjoyable.

I would like to thank my employer and colleagues, for their considerable support and the accommodations they afforded me. I'd also like to thank all the women who participated in this study and who provided their lived experience so honestly.

I would like to express my special thanks and appreciation to my mother and father for all their support and encouragement over the past two years. I am extremely grateful to my daughter Laura, who ensured I was able to devote myself to study, the completion of my dissertation would not have been possible without her unwavering support, love and many cups of coffee. Finally, Ciaran, thank you for providing me with lots of laughter and kindness.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the career progression of women employed in the Irish Civil Service. Through a quantitative online survey, participants will share insights of their experiences, opinions and views concerning the gendered nature of career progression in the Civil Service. There will be two questions where respondents can expand on their answers and provide insight to their experiences. Most recent data show 78% of Secretary Generals are male, while 22% of Secretary Generals are female, figures show that at clerical officer grade, 71% of staff were female compared to 29% percent of staff being male. In the most recent Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey, (2020) only 36% of staff reported that their Department/Office had a clear and fair promotion process. Fewer than 50% of staff between clerical officer grade and principal officer grade believed if they performed well, they would be promoted. This research will seek to illicit reasons why women are progressing within the Irish Civil Service at the rate they are, and to ascertain if the career progression of women in Irish Civil Service is conducted fairly and equitably.

The literature review provides an overview of relevant theories, supported by previous bodies of research. The findings and analysis focus on unpacking responses to questions concerning length of service, educational qualifications, experience of past promotional competitions, access to opportunities and flexible working arrangements, all underlying the career progression of women employed in the Civil Service.

There are well-developed policies in relation to flexible working arrangements, yet take-up of flexible working arrangements is highly gendered (female) and associated with lower-level occupations, i.e. clerical (Drew et al., 2003; O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003). Managers of staff do not lead by example, in taking advantage of flexible working arrangements (Drew and Murtagh, 2005), however they will often be the decision maker in relation to the practice and availability of flexible working arrangements. Despite gender equality developments within society, combined with evolving cultural standards, have gender specific norms have been slow to change in the Civil Service? It is my aim to identify through this research if career progression of women in the Irish Civil Service is conducted fairly and equitably.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context.

The Civil Service is responsible for implementing legislation, developing policies, managing service delivery, supporting government, and providing public services that combine to create the type of society we live in. For equality to be present in society, there must be equality in the design of policy and service delivery. According to Norris (2006), to achieve this, there needs to be equal representation of females in senior management positions, so that their input into policies is achieved and the services delivered are gender equitable. There is not equal representation of female staff at senior management grades within the Irish Civil Service, this research aims to examine if the career progression of women in the Irish Civil Service is conducted fairly and equitably.

The Civil Service Renewal Plan launched in 2014 contained a commitment to improving gender balance across all grades in the Civil Service. While gender balance has improved over recent years, (Figure 2), there are still significant differences when the gender ratio is examined. Especially concerning is the differential in higher grades within the Civil Service. In 2022, 78% of Secretary Generals were male, 22% of Secretary Generals were female. In stark contrast, figures show that at clerical officer grade, 71% of staff were female compared to 29% percent of staff being male. The overall gender breakdown was fifty-five percent female and forty-five percent male (Russell, 2017). Given that the Civil Service offers career progression opportunities to all employees via internal and external competitions, why are so many male staff progressing to higher management positions compared to female staff members? This is an important area of research as it is in society's best interest to have equal representation of females in all areas of public service, and to ensure there is fairness and equity within the Irish Civil Service.

The values of the Civil Service are defined as independence, respect, fairness, equality, impartiality and integrity. The single biggest resource of the Civil Service is its staff, there are 41,600 employees across eighteen departments. The Civil Service workforce should be representative of our society in general; diverse, inclusive, and promote gender equality. This balance would allow it to effectively design policy and deliver services for the population of Ireland. The Civil Service is at the heart of Irish society and therefore it needs to ensure that it is harnessing the full potential of all its workforce and delivering policies that are reflective of our society.

1.2 Research and its objectives.

According to the European Institute of Gender Equality, improvements in gender equality in the workplace would lead to an additional 10.5 million jobs in the European Union by 2050. "There are

massive economic benefits when equal gender participation in decision-making is embedded, leading to a more fair and balanced society”, (European Institute of Gender Equality, 2021). Increased numbers of employment opportunities would benefit both women and men. Approximately 70% of these new roles would be occupied by women. As identified by Pearce, (1978) and confirmed by Moghadam, (2005) the feminisation of poverty exists. Women are generally more affected by poverty than men, due to lower employment rates and wages, reduced access to opportunities. Greater employment of women would change the dynamic of our society. Having women in all areas of employment is equally important. Within the Irish Civil Service, there are startling differences in the gender breakdown, at different grades. Women occupy The Civil Service has invested in identifying reasons for less numbers of female staff being promoted to grades above higher executive officer. Research on gender balance in the Civil Service has been carried out by human resources, (Civil Service Renewal Plan, 2014) Economic and Social Research Ireland (ESRI), and an annual staff survey. As a result of the finding of the above research, all interview boards have been given training in unconscious bias.

A recent national survey conducted by the Central Statistics Office showed that gender balance is improving in businesses in Ireland as can be seen from the data below. There is a gradual increase of female numbers from 19.3% in 2019 to 23.68% in 2023 (Figure 1).

Gender breakdown by senior roles in business, 2019, 2021 and 2023						%
	2019		2021		2023	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Chairpersons	92.6	7.4	86.0	14.0	81.3	18.7
Boards of Directors	80.4	19.6	78.2	21.8	75.4	24.6
Chief Executive Officers (CEOs)	88.5	11.5	86.6	13.4	81.0	19.0
Senior Executives	71.7	28.3	70.3	29.7	69.6	30.4
Chief Financial Officers (CFOs)	70.3	29.7	71.9	28.1	74.3	25.7

Figure 1

Source: Central Statistics Office 2023

The data for the Civil Service is displayed below.

Civil Service: Percentage Female Representation in Senior Grades;

Grade	2007	2021	2022
Secretary General	19%	32%	40%
Assistance Secretary General	19%	43%	44%
Principal Officer	26%	48%	50%

Assistant Principal	23%	53%	54%
Totals	21.75%	44%	47%

Figure 2

In 2018, Government approved a policy for Top Level Appointments Committee, (TLAC), with a view to improving gender balance in public jobs. All competitions held for top level appointments have an under-pining goal of attaining a 50/50 gender balance on Management Boards. Where candidates compete for such positions and are of equal merit at the final stage of a competition, priority is given to the female candidate should that gender be underrepresented on the Management Board of the Department/Office in question. This have given rise to a perception held by male staff that they are the victims of gender bias via positive discrimination in favour of female employees, as identified in a study on gender balance at work by Enright, S. Russell, H. (2020).

The National Strategy for Women and Girls (NSWG), obliges all government departments to gender-proof new policies and review existing policies to ensure gender equality. The NSWG identified 'embedding gender equality in decision-making' as one of six high-level objectives. An integral management tool of the NSWG is an inter-departmental committee, which coordinates, stimulates, and mainstreams gender equality to ensure it remains at the forefront of decisions makers minds. The committee is entirely composed of managerial personnel (predominately female) who are in the position to promote and oversee policy implementation.

It is interesting to note the Civil Service Management Board, (who role is to implement gender equality improvements) is made up of 18 male and 5 female members. This makes the process of identifying gender specific issues and embedding gender equity more challenging as the importance of issues facing females may not be clear to a mostly male committee. Gender equity refers to the creation of conditions of fairness that take into consideration the diversity of all people across all genders and identities—not despite their gender, but in response to their gender.

1.3 Key research questions and objectives.

This research aims to explore the gendered nature of career progression in the civil service. It will explore whether unconscious bias is impacting negatively on the progression of women in the Civil Service. This research wishes to examine the issues of impartiality, equality and fairness within the Civil Service concerning the career progression of women. The questions being asked through my survey aim to help in understanding what issues are preventing women applying for and being successful in obtaining promotion to senior management grades. I am going to survey female staff members who are employed at higher executive officer grade and below, to see if there are common trends, what beliefs/opinions are held. For the purpose of this research, I have broken grades into three categories within the Irish Civil Service, these are as follows;

Senior Management Grades:

Director/Secretary General –SG, Assistant Secretary General – ASG, Principal Officer - PO, Assistant Principal Officer - AP.

Middle Management Grades:

Higher Executive Officer - HEO /Administrative Officer – AO.

General Administration Grades:

Executive Officer – EO, Clerical Officer - CO.

This research will seek to identify the most common issues females believe they face in accessing promotion and to look for intersectionality across these issues. It will examine if the culture of the civil service and the caring role of the female employee are at odds and how this may affect career progression of women in the Civil Service. Language used in the recruitment of senior management position can be nuanced, seeking driven, ambitious, ability to delegate etc Bohnet, I. (2016).

I will present these research findings, with the view that the findings may be used as a tool to improve the career progression of women within the Irish Civil Service.

The term 'intersectionality' has its roots in Black feminist activism and was originally coined by American critical legal race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989. Crenshaw used the term intersectionality to refer to the double discrimination of racism and sexism faced by Black women. In many instances women can face discrimination on more than one ground. If we apply feminist intersectional thinking to this research, there is the possibility of identifying some previously unseen issues within the gender equality realm of the Irish Civil Service.

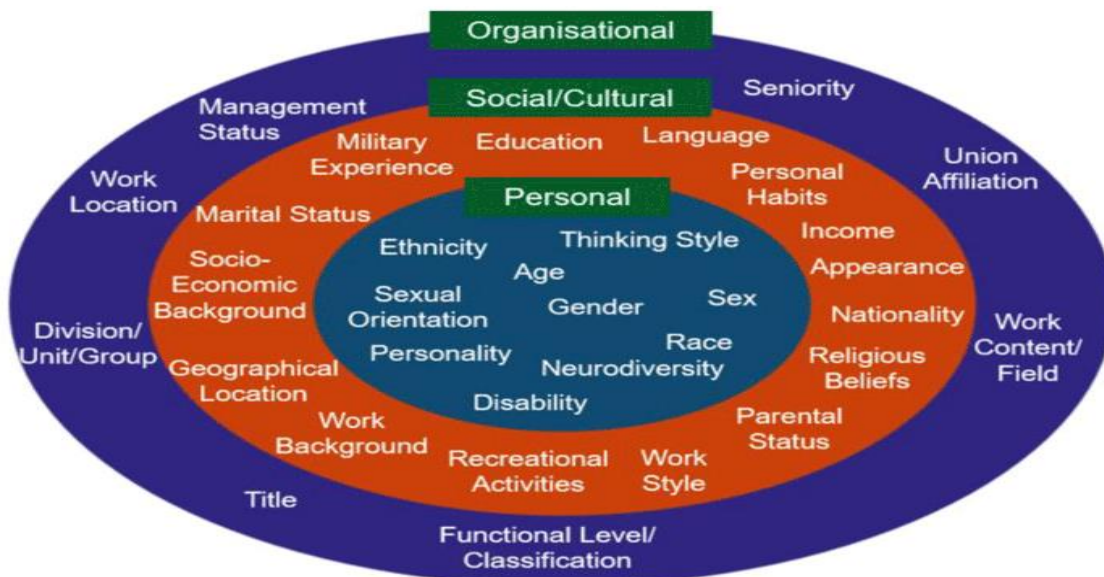


Figure 3.

The diagram above (diversity wheel) provides a visual representation of the areas where discrimination can take place, there is often an overlap between areas, when a person is discriminated against on more than one ground, this is referred to as intersectionality. The issue of intersectionality has not been examined in previous bodies of research when looking at gender balance in the Irish Civil Service. Intersectionality is how individual characteristics intersect with each other recognising the multiple aspects of a person which may disadvantage them- considering class, gender, race, disability and so forth, recognising that people are not one-dimensional. There can be bias and prejudices overlapping and creating compounded experiences of privilege and oppression. The culture of an organisation is also a factor to be considered when looking at Intersectionality. See diagram 3 showing the factors that can affect a person based on their characteristics. An employee may have experienced discrimination on any of the grounds identified within the three ellipses, or on multiple grounds.

The Civil Service offers a range of flexible working arrangements, that can be seen in the table below. Offering flexible working arrangements to employees is said to have a substantial and widely cited benefit to both organisations and participating individuals, Clark (2000), brought insights on flexible working arrangements and defined it as “family-friendly arrangement that can provide workers with the capacity to form and blend the boundaries of their work to allow a better fit to their family demands”. Flexible working arrangements are seen as valuable tools in managing the challenges of working and having caring/parental responsibilities. In a survey of self-employed entrepreneurs, “58 per cent of mothers felt that flexibility was very important for them while an additional 18 per cent also ranked such flexibility as important”, C Drew et al. (2003). We can also see that the “Productivity of workers is negatively impacted by work-family conflict”, Okolie et al, (2016) so it is in the employers benefit to have happy employees who are more productive. Making flexible working arrangements available freely to staff, allows for greater numbers of women to remain in the workforce, whilst enjoying flexibility in relation to personal life demands. Almost half of female civil servants (48%) have caring responsibilities, elderly parents, children, etc., (Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey, 2020). Female employees who choose not to apply for promotion, as recorded in the paper A Study of Gender in the Civil Service, Russell (2017), explained the lack of flexible working arrangements at senior management level was off putting. “Some interviewees highlighted their desire for a good work–life balance, which was not seen as possible at a more senior level”. Kant et al (2021) found there is flexibility stigma attached with the use of flexible work arrangements, that flexibility in work was mainly taken up by female staff and that availing of flexible working options did have a negative effect on financial, mental and emotional state.

Below are examples of questions participants will be asked while taking part in the survey include;

- Is there a culture or expectation of long hours in managerial grades? (Assistant Principal and above).
- Are grades above higher executive officer seen as greedy work? This is where a person must give more time, effort and devotion to the role for greater remuneration?
- Does the lack of flexible working arrangements, and Flexitime, at senior management level, influence women's interest in applying for senior management positions?

- Are policies in relation to flexible working arrangements delivered in a fair and equitable manner?
 - Do women in the Civil Service feel penalised for availing of flexible working arrangements?
 - Do female staff feel that there is unconscious bias in the recruitment process, language used in the advertisements can be masculine in approach, ie driven, career focused, ability to delegate.
- Bohnet, I. (2016)

I will seek to identify, what female staff would suggest from lived experience, are the reasons they are not applying for promotion, and investigate if there are fair and equitable opportunities afforded to women. Given the supports that the Civil Service has in place for staff, such as financial support for further education fees, providing training and development courses, study leave, exam leave, flexible working arrangements etc, there would appear to be equal opportunities for all staff. Gender balance across grades shows there is a disproportionate number of males in senior management roles, we must ask, is career progression of women conducted fairly?

1.4 Contribution.

Over 85% of employees in the Civil Service described having pride in their work and 80% reported being enthusiastic about their job (Employee Engagement Survey 2020). There is security of tenure, career progression and access to a range of flexible working arrangements. The number of employees accessing these flexible working arrangements is greater in public-sector employment than in the private sector, Russell et al. (2014). The civil service operates a career break scheme and provides an additional payment to those on maternity benefits above the Social Protection rate. Civil servants are also entitled to statutory leave provisions, such as maternity leave, parental leave, paternity leave, and sick leave. The Shorter Working Year Scheme allows civil servants to take additional unpaid leave of between two and 13 weeks to 'reconcile work and other commitments, including school holidays' (Circular 14/2009).

Many female employees choose not to apply for promotion, as recorded in the paper A Study of Gender in the Civil Service, Russell (2017). "Some interviewees highlighted their desire for a good work-life balance, which was not seen as possible at a more senior level". Despite the availability of some family-friendly working arrangements at senior management level, it would appear the prospect of "greedy work" is deterring women from applying for promotion. Despite flexible working arrangements being available to all grades at higher executive officer and below, this research will ask respondents if availing of these options is encouraged by management. The need for Flexible Working Arrangements is even more pressing in a single-parent home, where without the option of flexible working arrangements there may be no option but to leave the labour market. The work Russell and the ESRI have carried out has highlighted some of the reasons women do not rise through the grade structure in the Irish Civil Service, examples were extracted from research. Female employees were found to be content in their current role, having caring responsibilities that they may not be able to continue to provide if promoted, and feeling not qualified in all areas required for the role. This body of research will contribute to the ongoing conversation in Ireland around gender equality in the Irish Civil Service as a workplace. Using

multidisciplinary techniques this study will examine the complex relationship between, gender, flexible working conditions and promotional opportunities in the Civil Service. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights into the gendered nature of career progression in the Civil Service and may contribute to culture and policy changes within the Irish Civil Service.

1.5 Structure.

This dissertation is divided into chapters that cover various parts of the study in sequence. Chapter 2 is a detailed literature analysis, that puts this research challenge within theoretical frameworks and existing research papers. Chapter 3 details the methodology used in this research, including the research strategy, data gathering techniques and analytical procedures applied to the data. Chapter 4 contains the study's findings and analysis. Chapter 5 discusses key findings and how they may relate to previous studies. Limitations of the study and implications are also included here. Finally, Chapter 6 presents the conclusion and any recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction.

This chapter seeks to contextualise the nature of this research topic by reviewing and discussing the relevant literature. The scope of this research is to examine if career progression of women in the Irish civil service, is conducted fairly and equitably. I intend to examine the gendered nature of career progression in the Civil Service. I will explore amongst female employees, (at HEO level and below) their views and experiences of career progression, and the culture of the Irish Civil Service. By using the findings of previous qualitative studies in this area, (Russel et al, 2017, Drew, 2002 and Enright et al, 2020), I have been able to identify the most frequently voiced issues by female employees. (See figure 4). This is what women believe makes career progression more difficult for them, than it is for their male colleagues.

This literature review examines various aspects of gender equality research that has been carried out and synthesises the theories within. It will discuss policy implementation, barriers to equality, and the impact of gender diversity on organisational performance.

2.1 Organisational Culture.

Williams' 2010 book, *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate: Why Men and Class Matter*, offers a comprehensive analysis of work-life balance issues, focusing on the interplay of gender, class, and family responsibilities. Williams challenges traditional narratives and presents a nuanced perspective on how these factors shape the experiences of working individuals. Goldin's (2008) research indicates that organisational practices and norms, such as long hours and face-time requirements, disproportionately

disadvantage women who often bear more family responsibilities. The importance of a supportive workplace culture that normalizes work-life balance practices for both men and women is emphasised. This includes policies like paid family leave and on-site childcare. Goldin's extensive research provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted barriers women face in reaching senior management positions. Her work emphasises the importance of addressing career interruptions, improving workplace flexibility, and implementing supportive policies to foster gender equality in leadership. Leaders can better understand the barriers to attaining gender equality by looking at company culture and academic research (Andrade, 2022).

Research involving Irish mothers (of dual income households) found that flexible working options had positive results for working mothers in balancing childcare and work demands at mid-career stage. (Grady and McCarthy, 2008). Williams (2010) emphasises the need for supportive workplace cultures that normalise flexible work arrangements for both men and women. She suggests that without such support, women are more likely to face trade-offs between career advancement and family commitments, perpetuating the gender pay gap. Goldin (2014) argues that the lack of workplace flexibility is a significant barrier for women. She advocates for changes in organisational practices to accommodate flexible work arrangements, which can help reduce the gender pay gap by allowing women to maintain their career trajectories while managing family responsibilities. Williams (2010) also advocates for flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting, flexible hours, and part-time options, to help employees manage work and family responsibilities better. Williams similarly to Golden calls for comprehensive policy reforms, including paid family leave, affordable childcare, and labour laws that support work-life balance. Williams suggests redefining workplace success to value contributions and results over hours worked, encouraging a healthier work-life balance for all employees. This would help to remove the perception among male staff that flexible working arrangements are primarily for women, (61% of women have availed of flexible working arrangements in the past, whilst only 30% of men had availed of these options in the past. Enright, 2020).

Williams' analysis in "Reshaping the Work-Family Debate" offers a critical look at how gender, class, and societal expectations intersect to affect work-life balance. Her call for inclusive policies and cultural change aims to create a more equitable environment where both men and women can thrive professionally and personally. By addressing these issues, organisations and policymakers can work towards fostering a more balanced and inclusive work environment that acknowledges and supports the diverse needs of their workforce. Goldin's (2004, 2008) extensive research provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted barriers women face in reaching senior management positions. Her work emphasises the importance of addressing career interruptions, improving workplace flexibility, and implementing supportive policies to foster gender equality in leadership. Both Goldin and Williams provide valuable insights into the gender pay gap, highlighting how career interruptions, workplace flexibility, discrimination, and occupational segregation contribute to this issue. Their research underscores the importance of supportive organisational cultures and comprehensive policy reforms to address these barriers and promote gender equality in the workforce.

By synthesising the work of Goldin, Williams, and other scholars, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of the gender equality and the necessary steps to achieve greater gender equality in the labour market. Organisations, their culture and how they integrate policies within the workplace is critical in achieving equality for women. Although policies promoting gender equality exist, their implementation and application vary widely. In many cases, there is a gap between policy and practice, with no controls or governance applied.

It is in all our interests, socially, and politically to ensure that there is gender balance in our public service and our society. Sen, (1999) in his book “Development as Freedom “, states that gender equality in policy is a matter of social justice and human rights. He asserts that gender equality is a factor in quality of life, and the more freedoms a person can enjoy, it will lead them to live the kind of life they can value. Sen suggests there are five freedoms, Political, Social opportunities, Economic facilities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. Each of the freedoms are inter-linked and contribute to the capability of an individual to live a life where they can reach their full potential. Without gender equality in the workplace female employees are not enjoying all these freedoms and therefore cannot live a life they value.

Norris (2006) argues that diverse representation in decision-making processes leads to more comprehensive and effective policies, whilst Klasen et al (2009) propose that “Gender equality can significantly contribute to economic growth. When women have equal access to education and employment opportunities, the labour force expands, productivity increases, and economies grow”. This can be evidenced when we look at Nordic countries, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland consistently rank high in both social justice and gender equality. They perform well in the Social Justice Index (Schraad-Tischler, 2017) and the Global Gender Gap Report (2020), indicating robust systems of social welfare, education, and gender equality policies. It is important the culture of an organisation places value of the role of women in the workplace, to hold onto the valuable resource that they have.

2.2 Attributes of Senior Management Roles.

The opportunity for flexible working arrangements can be limited at higher levels of the occupational hierarchy (Assistant Principal and above) and availing of part-time work options can have negative consequences for career development. Humphreys et al. (1999, p. 124) reported that at Assistant Principal Level, 85% of women and 65% of men report that they regularly work extra hours. Is this a case that the workload is too great at Assistant Principal level? Are staff expected to work extra hours, and is this seen as a sign of your commitment to the role? In the study by Valiulis et al. (2008) of the Irish civil service, the long-hours culture was seen to exclude those with greater caring responsibilities and benefit men with no caring responsibilities or a partner who did not work outside the home. Many female civil servants (48%) have caring responsibilities, elderly parents, children, etc., (Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey, 2020) and may need to use flexible working arrangements to meet their caring

commitments. By accessing flexible working arrangements to facilitate meeting their caring obligations, are females signalling that they cannot commit to “long hours” and thus hampering their promotional opportunities? Throughout her research and in her book, *Career and Family*, Claudia Golden has examined the causes of inequality and gender pay gaps in the workplace. She refers to some employments as being “greedy work” – meaning that a job will take from your free time, demanding longer hours and greater level of commitment. Professional and Management roles are seen as greedy work in general as the pay is greater but so too is the commitment required. In their research “Gender Balance at work” Russell et al. (2020), proved senior roles within the Civil Service can be viewed as greedy work, due to “the expectation of long hours and women avoid these roles as it would impinge on their work life balance and caring responsibilities”. This is an example of intersectionality. Gender equality in the Civil Service fails to consider intersectionality of other social categories such as race, class, and disability. Social, cultural and personal factors will have an impact on female employees being able to meet the requirements of senior management if longer working days are required. Women from marginalised communities may face compounded discrimination in employment and advancement. Gender equality in the civil service has been a focal point of research and policy development for many years, (Humphries et al. 1999, Drew, 2002, Enright et al, 2020). Each research project identified several difficulties in female staff securing promotion, with similarities in each set of findings.

These findings are outlined below in figure 4.

Name of Study	Study of Gender in Civil Service, Russell et Al, 2017	Gender Balance @ Work, Enright et Al. 2020	Delivering Better Government, Drew 2002
Lack of supports for recent appointees	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lack of flexible working arrangements in Senior Mgmt. Roll	Yes	Yes	Yes
Intensity of work	Yes	Not identified	Yes
Longer hours expected, 12-14hr day	Yes	Not identified	Yes
No reduction in workload if availing of FWA	Yes	Not identified	Not identified
Lack of opportunity to gain exp. Required for senior roles.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Females more likely to work in service delivery roles, not impressive at interviews.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Females are less involved in policy	Yes	Yes	Yes

Females have less opportunities for travel abroad.	Yes	Yes	Yes

Figure 4

The findings of these projects identify similar issues, despite the studies being conducted over a period of twenty years. Some of the issues that were not identified in Enright's 2020 report, such as work intensity and longer hours, were not asked of the participants, hence there is no feedback in relation to these points.

If we look at the issues identified above, but through a feminist intersectionality lens, then can delve deeper into the problems identified in previous studies. I will be exploring the following points within my research as they have not been addressed in previous projects. If promotion to senior management level means you must work longer hours, while still meeting your caring responsibility, and you must be open to moving to a new geographic location, this can become an impossible challenge. This is especially difficult if an employee is a single parent. Promotion in this case would not be an advantage. Gender equity needs to be introduced so that the civil service can get the best person for the job. If the best person for a role happens to be a single parent, who resides 200km from the workplace, then human resources should be looking at solutions to accommodate this person, regardless of gender. Women continue to face certain barriers regarding access to employment and promotion, as well as in reaching high-rank positions, partly due to their greater involvement in family responsibilities Dancausa et al., (2021). When you look at the issue of career progression through the intersectionality lens, you see women face overcoming a matrix of challenges so that they can enjoy a rewarding career and meet their responsibilities.

2.3 Flexible Working Arrangements.

To both contextualise and understand this concept, this study proceeds by establishing how flexible working policies are currently created and understood in the framework of the European Union (EU) in which Ireland is operative. In this context, EU Directives and Recommendations set certain guarantees in terms of family-related leaves (e.g. maternity and parental) and standard maximum working hours. Under these parameters, state policies have developed around three main areas: statutory working hours, state funded childcare schemes and mandated leave arrangements. It should be noted that there exist significant differences in how these strands have translated into policy across the EU and within member states. Despite demographic structure no longer reflecting the old stereotype 'breadwinner' (man working, woman at home) model, EU states and organisations as well as social researchers have remained focused mainly on the relationships between women, family and work. Therefore, most policies merely maintain the status quo imbalances. Walby (1990) highlights this lack of foresight as the dominant force in continuing workplace inequality while Young (1999) argues that such focus may be

attributed to the emergence / reinforcement of a 'family-friendly backlash' from childless employees who feel penalised. What was once referred to as family friendly working practices, is now called flexible working arrangements.

The Civil Service offers a range of flexible working arrangements, that can be seen in the table below. Offering flexible working arrangements to employees is said to have a substantial and widely cited benefit to both organisations and participating individuals (Drew et al. 2003; Deven and Moss 2008). It also allows for greater numbers of women to remain in the workforce, by working when children are in school, and taking advantage of flexible working arrangements during school holidays. In Ireland, women spend roughly twice the amount of time on care every week compared to men (Russell et al., 2019).

The following arrangements are available to all staff, although many need a line managers approval (figure 5).

Flexible Working Arrangements available to Civil Servants;

Flexitime or Core-hours	Allows people to choose the start and end time of working day and allows for extended lunch breaks. Based on a rolling 4-week period, workers can accrue hours and take up to 1.5 days off in next 4-week period	No manager approval needed Only available to HEO grade.
Part-time Working	Allows staff to reduce hours worked per week, on an ongoing basis.	Manager approval needed
Job-sharing	Allows two staff to split a role, working alternate hours.	Manager approval needed
Term-time work / Shorter working year	Allows staff to take unpaid leave for a period up to 13 weeks. Salary paid pro rata.	Manager approval needed
Staggered hours	Employees in the same area have different start times.	Manager approval needed
Homeworking/working from Hub	Working from home/hub, numbers greatly increased post Covid 19 once productivity was assured.	Manager approval needed
Time off in lieu	Employees can take hours off, instead of taking payment, for extra hours worked.	Manager approval needed
Parental Leave/Maternity Leave	Payment made to top up state benefit to full wages while on statutory leave	No Managerial approval needed
Parental leave	Unpaid leave for each child, taken at parents' discretion once 6 weeks' notice given.	Manager approval needed

Figure 5

This research will examine relationship between the utilisation of family-friendly work practices and promotion, and to what extent do female staff feel, that availing of these family-friendly practices had any effect on their career advancement? Is there difficulty in getting approval for flexible working arrangements within the Irish Civil Service, (due to stigma, unconscious bias, workloads, staffing numbers?).

2.4 Motherhood Penalty.

Williams (2010) discusses the area of gender dynamics, and the traditional roles associated with them. Williams emphasises that traditional gender roles significantly impact work-life balance. Women often bear the brunt of family responsibilities, leading to challenges in managing professional and personal life. Similarly, Goldin suggests that women are more likely to seek part-time work or flexible schedules to balance family responsibilities, which can limit their opportunities for promotions and senior roles (Goldin, 2014). This is similarly reflected in the study carried out by Enright et al, (2020) "Access to flexible working practices has been highlighted as one element of the toolkit to promote greater gender equality. It is also noted that such access needs to be available at higher organisational levels and to be availed of by both men and women". There is more evidence that female employees use flexible working arrangements to balance their responsibilities in relation to caring for others. Enright (2017) showed that respondents with childcare responsibilities also had significantly higher odds of previous and current participation in flexible working arrangements. There is evidence that those who availed of flexible working arrangements, felt their promotional opportunities were negatively affected. According to Russell over 30% of respondents indicated that this was the trade-off for them. Women are more likely to participate in part-time work than their male counterparts (Russell and McGinnity, 2011).

This is referred to by experts as the Motherhood Penalty. Williams (2010) discusses the "motherhood penalty," where mothers face career disadvantages, such as lower pay and fewer promotions, due to perceived reduced commitment to work. Goldin (2014) demonstrates that career interruptions related to childbirth and childcare responsibilities significantly impact women's earnings. These interruptions often result in lost work experience, reduced skill accumulation, and fewer promotion opportunities, contributing to a persistent earnings gap between mothers and non-mothers.

Williams (2010) showed that middle-class families struggle with balancing dual-career dynamics and high expectations for parenting, leading to stress and work-life balance conflict, meanwhile working-class families face different challenges, such as inflexible work schedules, lack of paid leave, and job insecurity, which exacerbate work-life balance issues. A single parent family would be doubly affected by these challenges. Williams (2010) also argues that traditional notions of masculinity discourage men from taking an active role in family responsibilities, reinforcing gender disparities in work-life balance. William's research and book, *Reshaping the Work/Family debate*, highlights the need for greater paternal involvement and the societal shift required to support men in embracing caregiving roles without stigma. Goldin (2014) demonstrates that career interruptions related to childbirth and childcare

responsibilities significantly impact women's earnings. Experts agree, the cost of having a family, in terms of career progressing affects women more so than it does men.

2.5 Greedy Work.

The incompatibility between long working hours and caring led Cahusac and Kanji (2014) to argue that “The requirement to work long hours is an unstated, and hence cultural, affirmation that organizational cultures disdain care”. Many workers use flexible working hours as a method of balancing the responsibility of childcare. The percentage of female employees in senior management grades in the Civil Service is greatly reduced after the grade of Higher Executive Officer. Higher Executive Officer is the most senior grade with the option to avail of flexitime. Is this a coincidence?

Grade	Percentage Female 2016	Percentage Female 2021	Percentage Female 2022	Total number of staff
Secretary General (SEC)	21.2%	32%	40%	33
Second Secretary (SSC)	33.3%			3
Deputy Secretary (DS)	27.3%			22
Assistant Secretary (AS)	33.0%	43%	44%	212
Principal Officer (PO)	40.1%	48%	50%	1328
Assistant Principal (AP)	48%	53%	54%	3826
Administrative Officer (AO)	47.6%			2,247
Higher Executive Officer (HEO)	58%			4,652
Executive Officer (EO)	60.6%			6,699
Staff Officer (SO)	79.1%			1,516
Clerical Officer (CO)	74.7%			12,716
Totals	63.1%			33,254

Figure 6 Females share and number of civil servants by grade (2016) Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Golden (2021) describes the phenomenon of working more hours than you are contracted to, in order to carry out the duties of your role as “greedy work”. Goldin asserts that only one partner can have a greedy role, the other person must work in a role that is not greedy. This is often a role where there is greater flexibility (quite often this comes with a lower rate of remuneration) so that the couple can meet the joint responsibilities of the couple/family.

This research will examine if there is a culture within the Civil Service, that only staff who can make themselves available to work long hours are worthy of promotion or capable of carrying out the duties associated with senior management roles (Assistant Principle and above). Is the role of Assistant Principal viewed by female civil servants as “greedy work” due to the culture of AP’s working hours beyond their remunerated rate? Furthermore, there is no flexitime available to grades at Assistant Principal and above, this is the cohort that was identified in the ESRI survey (Russell 2020) as needing to work extra hours and is also the first grade at senior management level. Russell et al have produced comprehensive research on gender equality in the Civil Service, detailing issues they identified as the causes of lower rates of promotion for women in the Civil Service. Some of the recommendations have been incorporated into the latest Civil Service Renewal Plan 2030, such as mentoring and leadership training. There is no reference to the “greedy work”, or a recommendation to introduce flexitime to grades at AP. With flexitime, you can accrue hours for extra time worked in a four-week period, perhaps the implementation of Flexitime for these grades would make the position more attractive to women?

These higher-level roles are where policy is drawn up and functional decisions are made, without female input at this level the Civil Service is not representative of the society we live in. Family-friendly work arrangements that are available are often viewed by serving Civil Servants as compensation for lower rates of pay, in comparison to salaries paid in the private sector as expressed in the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey, 2020.

Golden (2021) suggests that “Even a woman who is getting a salary that could be verified as *fair and unbiased*, may still earn less than a comparable man in the same profession if she is unable to put in the longer hours or be on call because of the constraints of family and children”. If we look at the Civil Service, we can see that salaries are fair and unbiased, employees are paid a salary, based on the Grade they hold and the incremental rate they are on within the pay scale. In a recent report published by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2022), the gender pay gap was found to be 10.56%. The explanation provided was “Overall, the Gender Pay Gap in the Department is 10.56%, mainly reflecting the greater proportion of women in junior grades and the high proportion of women availing of part-time work options”. The part-time work options referred to are work sharing, parental leave, and shorter working year, often used to provide childcare during summer holidays. This is confirmed within the report, “The vast majority of staff availing of work-sharing are women (89%)”. Women are availing of Flexible Working Arrangements in such greater numbers, why is this?

This research will pose the question to female employees in the Civil Service, “do you believe senior management roles require additional hours of work to meet the demands of the role?”. If women feel that they must work additional hours over their contracted amount, to fulfil the challenges of senior management roles this may be affecting the numbers of female staff that are willing to apply for senior

management roles. Research carried out by Russell, (2017). presented the following data as barriers to women seeking promotion.

- lack of confidence,
- lack of structured handover and induction in a new role,
- lack of flexibility,
- long hours culture,
- high levels of work intensity.

This research will look for any correlation between Goldin's theory of "greedy work" and the Senior Management Roles within the Civil Service.

The expectation of longer hours and high levels of work intensity could be mitigated by Flexitime, and a structured induction and training programme. In this research project I am focused on identifying if the career progression of women in the civil service is conducted fairly and equitably. Obstacles to promotion to senior management positions (Assistant Principal and above) for women in the Civil Service, once identified should be removed, to ensure fairness and equality.

It is my aim to identify any process or cultural practices that are unfair to women seeking promotion above Higher Executive Officer level. I will research if there are disadvantages associated with having availed of flexible working arrangements in the past, and if the perceived lack of flexible working conditions and absence of flexible working arrangements at these Senior Management posts acts as a deterrent for women when considering an application.

Although many male employees in the Civil Service avail of flexible working arrangements, I am specifically looking for a woman's perspective in this research. This is due to the need for overall gender equality in an organisation, such as the Civil Service. The gender role breakdown among senior staff effects the way the Civil Service makes decisions, designs policy and develops and maintains relationships within day-to-day activities. In a broader sociological perspective, gender can be defined as a concept which is determined socially or in other words a social construct, according to Ely et al. (2000),

"Gender is an individual characteristic marked by one's biological category as male or female. Sex-role socialization produces individual differences in attitudes and behaviours between men and women".

Gender differences in promotional outcomes may be due not only to the Civil Services structure but also the culture within the organisation. Organisational culture can be defined as "the taken for granted values, underlying assumptions, expectations, collective memories and definitions present in any organisation" (O'Riordan, 2015). In a study of the Irish public health service, (O'Connor 1996) identified several practices that prevented women from obtaining promotion, including lack of communication about opportunities (women on various forms of leave not being informed of competitions), stereotypical attitudes about women's abilities and career aspirations, and exclusion from male

networks. Valiulis et al. (2008) highlight the 'male dominated' (p.61) culture of the Irish Civil Service. They note how many of the women in the study perceived a promotional bias towards those who had more network connections within the organisation which put women, especially those with children, at a disadvantage as they did not have as much time to socialise.

Hence it is of immense value to examine what the reasons are for women not reaching the higher grades in equal numbers as men, as their input is crucial to creating an equitable society. This is essential if the Civil Service wants to ensure gender equality and empower women.

2.6 Civil Service Renewal Strategy 2030.

The valuable input of women in senior management roles is reflected in the policies and decisions made by an organisation. The Civil Service Renewal Strategy 2030 recognises that we are working in a rapidly changing Ireland with a growing and increasingly diverse population. It sets out the need to ensure that all policy and service delivery responses are focused on equality, inclusion and accessibility, and that the composition of the Civil Service itself should reflect this changing Ireland. For the Civil Service to meet these challenges it is imperative that it tackles gender equality in its staff at Senior Management level. The Civil Service Renewal Strategy, 2030 is a ten-year strategy. The first action plan to be rolled out within this overall strategy is Civil Service Renewal 2024. This plan sets out the actions which the Department is committed to delivering, recognising that addressing system wide issues requires collaboration and a whole of government approach. The first part to be implemented covers three areas,

- Digital First and Embedding Innovation,
- Workforce, Workplace and Organisation of the Future,
- Evidence-Informed Policy and Services.

Under the heading of Workforce for the future, the plans states, "A more diverse Civil Service workforce" and "Revised competencies for the Civil Service Workforce of the Future".

Gender equality is unfortunately not featuring in the first part of the action plan, although it could be part of the overall aim, and embedded within these two points. Given the backlash to gender quotas, this is not surprising. It is important via this research to highlight possible issues that maybe present in the culture of the Civil Service, that are preventing female staff seeking promotion to senior management roles. If nothing changes, then the outcomes of recruitment campaigns will also stay the same.

2.7 Research Objectives.

My research seeks to investigate the viewpoints of female staff within the Irish civil service with an objective on understanding if they view the career progression of women is equitable and fair, and to look at the results through a feminist lens.

I aim to investigate if the organisational culture is biased against women who balance caring responsibilities with working in the civil service and utilise flexible working arrangements to achieve this? I will investigate if female staff have experienced a difference between policy and practice in relation to accessing flexible working arrangements, is it widely available to females and is there a cost to career progression if a person avails of flexible working arrangements? I hope to gather nuanced opinions across different sections of the Irish Civil Service by surveying female staff who are randomly selected and who have availed of flexible working arrangements in their past career.

My study seeks to provide an insight into the complex interactions of cultural norms, gender dynamics and the career progression of women within the Irish Civil Service.

2.8 Conclusion.

This literature review serves as a basic review of previous research relevant to my own topic, providing a background and useful context to my own research. Drawing on the papers, journals, and books mentioned in this study, I intend to perform a thorough examination of extant research. By synthesizing ideas from scholarly literature and comparing them to the survey results, I aim to reveal nuanced viewpoints on the career progression of women employed in the Irish Civil Service.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Introduction.

In this chapter, I will discuss the methods of research and data analysis I have implemented as part of this research project. I will discuss the mode of data collection I have used and the reasoning behind using these. I will discuss how the data collected has been analysed in the context of forming and solidifying my proposed research question and theories. Furthermore, I will discuss the resources, materials, and techniques used during the research and data-gathering procedures. By providing a thorough review of these components, readers will acquire a better grasp of the preparation and execution that drives this research. Readers will benefit from this explanation of the study technique and the validity of the conclusions produced from it.

I plan to use quantitative methods to investigate the lived experiences and views of women, of different ages and lengths of employment employed in the Civil Service. By combining data from several sources, including scholarly literature and primary research, I hope to get comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of organisational culture, unconscious bias and gender dynamics in creating fair and equitable career progression pathway for women employed within the Irish Civil Service. I plan to bring fresh insights into the fair and equitable career progression of women employed in the Irish Civil Service.

3.1 Rational.

In this research project I set out to gather first-hand information in relation to the fairness and equality of career progression of women employed within the Irish Civil Service.

It was proposed to use quantitative methodology when approaching this research, random sampling of female civil servants was selected, to gather the views of a large population as possible. Probability sampling was selected, and survey questions were posed with a rating style answer, respondents could select if they strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree or strongly disagree. When designing the survey, I included two questions that were qualitative in style, in that they sought the experience of the respondent. This was to allow for examples to be provided by the respondent, providing a deeper level of data.

Female Civil Servants were invited to complete an anonymised online survey. This is a method of research which is familiar to serving civil servant as it is commonly used in the Civil Service Employee Engagement survey, which takes place annually. It allowed for the respondents to be provided with anonymity and the survey could be completed discretely. There was a plain language statement and an ethics form, provided with the survey which ensured an ethical research proposal. All respondents could opt out at any stage of the process.

It was anticipated that some of these women would have caring responsibilities outside work and a question in relation to this was included in the survey, "the factors that can influence the working patterns of women include the family situation in terms of the number and age of children, the existence of a partner, the gender attitudes of both partners, and the women's and their partners' human capital such as income, education, and occupational levels, (Schober, 2013)". It was expected given the grades being surveyed, and the salaries associated with these grades, that there would be a percentage of respondents who occupied the primary caring role in the home. Human capital such as income of a spouse can play a role in deciding which spouse takes on the caring role if needed.

This research sought to engage with women who are employed in the Irish Civil Service and have availed of flexible working arrangements in the past. They were provided with a link to the survey, via email, LinkedIn invitation and the link was circulated on social media to females employed in the Civil Service at present. Survey Monkey was utilised to create the survey, and a copy of this survey is displayed at Appendix B. The survey went live on the week commencing 22nd of July 2024 and was closed on the 1st of August 2024. A total of 380 respondents completed the survey.

3.2 The Research Approach and Strategy.

To begin this data gathering stage, I conducted research of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Some studies make the mistake of starting with the decision of which research tools should be used. In this instance I utilised the research onion. Alternatively, Saunders et al. (2003) suggest that, before coming to this central point, there are important layers of what they term a 'research onion' that need to be peeled away, see below. Within this onion, the first two layers raise questions about the

research philosophy and its implications for analysis. The final three layers examine what they call research strategy, time horizon and data collection methods.

Similarly, this research project began by exploring this research onion as a useful approach to determining the most appropriate research strategy. There are four main forms of philosophy, positivism, interpretivism, realism and pragmatism. Outside these main forms, there is a feminist philosophy, which is particularly relevant to this topic. The approach I felt most suited this study was a combination of feminist and interpretivist epistemologies. Interpretivism argues that the world must be analysed as an ever-changing entity within which researchers can only examine a particular set of circumstances and individuals. As individuals are all unique, views and beliefs will vary from respondent to respondent and from day to day. However, interpretivists believe that one can discover what Remenyi et al. (1998) describe as "the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind them." This is social constructivism; it views the world as socially constructed in that people may impose a variety of interpretations upon situations in which they find themselves. It is therefore the role of the interpretivist to seek to understand the subjective reality of those they study, to understand their motives and actions. I will be applying a feminist lens to the study, and in keeping with feminist epistemologies, this thesis also proceeds from an implicit understanding that research and knowledge are inseparable from the researcher (unconscious bias) insofar as they reflect the author's particular perspective of socially constructed phenomena such as the influence of patriarchy or gender roles (feminism).

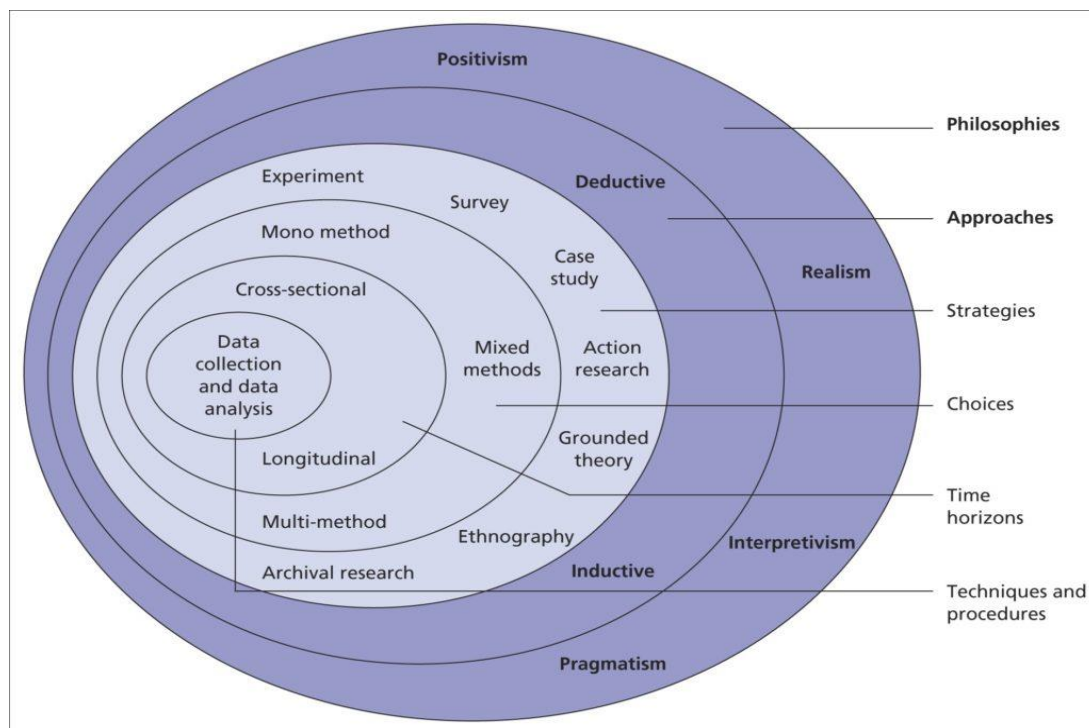


Figure 7

The Research 'Onion' Adapted from Saunders et al. (2003)

I selected to use quantitative methods in my research, in the form of an online survey. The sampling frame was women employed in the Irish Civil Service at grades below Higher Executive Officer. The probability sample was selected on known factors, female, working in Irish Civil Service. This allowed for a larger population to be surveyed across a larger geographic area, that is a representative sample of all female employees within the Irish civil Service. I began the data collection process by creating sets of relevant questions to ask those taking part in the surveys. I laid these questions out along with a plain language statement and consent form, which ensured an ethical research proposal. I ensured the questions were unbiased, referencing previous works, it was essential to establish relevant questions that gave insight into lived experiences of female staff employed in the civil service. I made sure the questions were relevant to the topic and presented the questions in an unbiased manner. The questions within the survey took the form of strongly agree/agree/disagree/strongly disagree /don't know. Some questions allowed a space where the respondent can express their own lived experience. This would allow for systemic and structured data collection, and will allow me to test the hypothesis, whether the career progression of women in the Irish Civil Service is conducted fairly and equitably.

The data collected throughout this research was provided by female civil servants across different departments in various locations in Ireland, who were employed at HEO level and below. It was ensured that each subject understood the scope and purpose of the study, this was achieved by including with the link to the survey, an introduction explaining the purpose of the survey and a copy of the ethics form. This provided context, explained the purpose of the research and assured respondents of the confidential nature of the information they supply. With the use of statistical data analysis, I will test the hypothesis that the career progression of women in the Irish Civil Service is conducted fairly and equitably.

The survey was collected anonymously to provide psychological safety and to allow for a more honest reflection by serving staff, without fear of recrimination. The survey contained questions that looked at respondents' demographic variables, caring responsibilities, flexible working arrangements. It also examined beliefs and experiences in relation to promotion opportunities. This data collected will give insight into the relationship between gender, accessibility of flexible work arrangements, women's perceptions of organisational support for flexibility, work-life balance and gender equality, lived experiences, and the culture within the Civil Service.

This data collected and its subsequent analysis will add to the understanding of how caring responsibilities influence employment experiences and perception of promotional prospects. Further analysis can be carried out to compare data gathered to previous surveys by ESRI, to see if there are any similarities or differences between both sets of data.

Furthermore, this research will look at the following questions.

- Is there a perceived negative impact on promotional prospects for female staff in the Civil Service if they avail of flexible working arrangements?

- Is there a culture that excludes female employees from applying for roles at AP level and above, due to the expectation of “long hours” being demanded?
- Is a candidate disadvantaged if they have previously availed of flexible working arrangements, due to opportunities lost?
- Is there a lack of opportunities to meet the competencies required for an interview if a woman has availed of flexible working arrangements?
- Is there unconscious bias within senior management when delegating responsibility to team members, full-time staff versus part-time staff? (Part-time staff being those on FWA).
- Do women, who have availed of Flexible Working Arrangements feel they are not qualified for senior roles, despite ability and qualifications?
- Would the provision of Flexi time at Senior Management Grades entice more women to apply for these positions?

3.3 Resources, tools and technology utilised.

The resources used in the collection of data for the purpose of this research project include a survey which I created using a Survey Monkey account. I circulated this survey invitation via my LinkedIn account and emailed a link to colleagues in different departments within the Irish Civil Service. This is a form of stratified random sampling, female, civil servants.

The questions asked were created through a process of gathering inspiration from investigative research projects such as Women and ambition in the Irish civil service, Valiulis, (2008). and Organisational Culture and the Public Service. State of the Public Service Series, O’Riordan, J. (2015).

I used my laptop and university-affiliated accounts to store data as well as my writings pertaining to the research to ensure the privacy of those involved. The respondents taking part in this research project are a tool of information collection as the information obtained through the surveys and interviews is an essential means of identifying primary source patterns, opinions and viewpoints on the subject matter being discussed. I am grateful for their participation.

3.4 Obstacles in methodology.

The complexity and uniqueness of human nature creates some inherent obstacles in data collecting involving human participants. Surveys intended for collecting people's opinions are prone to errors due to the fact responses might be biased or exaggerated to emphasise an ulterior objective or position. A

person's mood on the day they complete the survey may affect the response they give. It is accepted that this form of stratified random sampling can have some limitations, it is open to completion by persons who do not fit the identified population or may be affected by other variables. Furthermore, some misunderstandings may occur throughout the data-gathering process, compromising the accuracy of the collected information. Human error, whether reading the question or its interpretation adds another difficulty to methodological issues. It is important to acknowledge these challenges to ensure the integrity and reliability of research findings. Some limitations include accessing a broad and diverse range of respondents and ensuring the population completing the survey are the desired sample. It is hoped that the nature of this research and its random selection of respondents will provide a fair representation of the larger female staff employed within the Irish Civil Service. Ensuring that I avoid including my own unconscious bias in the research is an essential element, I have kept this to the forefront of my mind.

3.5 Conclusion.

The reason for my methodological choices was based in how important it was to acquire first-hand data in order to study the career progression of female civil servants in Ireland. This chapter offers an in-depth examination of the approaches used in my research project, providing insights into the motivation, procedures, and obstacles encountered. I will develop relevant results that provide a better knowledge of the examined issue by collecting and analysing data meticulously.

Chapter 4 – Findings and Analysis

Introduction.

In this chapter the information gathered from the survey will be presented in an unbiased and objective manner, the data will be analysed using inferential and inductive techniques. The participant's perspective is taken, and inductive reasoning is applied to this.

4.1 Participant Information.

The survey asked several questions in relation to three main areas, personal organisational and . The first area was the personal factors unique to the individuals' circumstances, the second area covered organisational factors, such as flexible working This covered, length of service, caring responsibility, education and past promotion. There is some overlap between personal factors and organisational factors, i.e. promotion in the past. It is both relevant to the organisation and the respondent.

Data showed most of the respondents had worked in the Civil Service for a period of greater than ten years, see table 1. 60.53% of respondents had been employed in the organisation for ten years or more. Only 5.26% of respondents were employed less than two years.

> 2 YEARS	5.26%
2 – 5 YEARS	7.89%
5 – 10 YEARS	26.32%
> 10 YEARS	60.53%

Table 1

In the survey respondents were asked if they had a caring responsibility outside work, see table 2. A total of 68.42% of female staff had caring responsibility, 42.11% cared for children, 10.53% cared for adults and 15.79% cared for both adults and children. 31.58% of employees surveyed did not have any caring responsibility. This is an increase of previously reported caring responsibilities, 48% of female employees indicated they had a caring responsibility in 2020 (CSEES, 2020).

Yes, Children	42.11%
Yes, Adults	10.53%
Yes, both Adults and Children	15.79%
No caring responsibility	31.58%

Table 2

Participants were asked to indicate their educational attainment; the responses were as follows in Table 3. This shows a highly educated cohort, with 81.58% holding a third level qualification.

Second level	18.42%
Certificate/Diploma	36.84%
Degree	23.68%
Masters/Doctorate	21.05%

Table 3

Respondents were then asked if they had been promoted whilst working in the Civil Service, see table 4. The results showed 65.79% of female employees had been promoted within their career in the Civil Service.

Yes	65.79%
No	34.21%

Table 4

The information above shows a highly educated, motivated and mobile workforce. It also shows an increase in the percentage of staff with a caring responsibility. In 2020, a Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey showed that 48% of staff had a caring responsibility. This research shows that 68.48% of female staff have a caring responsibility. We can infer from this data that a higher percentage of female staff than male counterparts carry the caring burden outside of work, given the breakdown of male to female employees.

4.2 Organisational factors.

Promotional Competitions

Respondents were asked if they had applied for promotion to Assistant Principal or Principal Officer grades previously. Despite over 60% of staff previously having been promoted during their service with the organisation, showing they are an agile body of staff, only 31.58% had applied for promotion to senior management positions, see table 5. This cohort of experienced staff of whom over 40% of hold a degree, master's or doctorate did not feel that there was a benefit to applying for these grades despite a minimum salary increase of at least seven thousand euro and access to an incremental pay scale that ranges from 78,303 to 97,583 for Assistant Principal and 101,894 to 126,035 for Principal Officer.

The responses showed only 31.58% of female staff have made an application for AP/PO in the past.

Yes	31.58%
No	68.42%

Table 5

Previous studies (Russell et al. 2017) have shown that female employees in the civil service do not feel confident in applying for these senior management roles. Women who were interviewed felt there was lack of structured handover and induction in a new role, lack of flexibility, and a culture of long hours coupled with a high level of work intensity. We can infer from this result that there is still a lack confidence in the ability of civil service to support female staff in the role of Assistant Principal (AP) and Principal Officer (PO).

Respondents were asked, "In your opinion, what could be improved in the current policies to better support women's career progression?" The resounding view was, there is a need for a mentoring programme/training. Over 80% of respondents suggested a structured mentoring programme for newly appointed staff and a training programme for staff who wish to apply for these posts at Assistant Principal and Principal Officer level.

There is no formal mentoring programme or structured training in place to support newly appointed officers in AP or PO grade across all departments, although some departments offer mentoring it is not widely available.

One respondent included the following note in her survey,

“Better mentoring programme at local level”,

another respondent said,

“Mentoring and clear progression paths, linked to training and development”

whilst another suggested that,

“Assistance with promotion competition preparation made available from outside your own office or department”.

It is clear from these replies that a high percentage of female employees feel there needs to be a mentoring programme in place and a clearly defined training programme for leadership/senior management positions.

Flexible Working Arrangements

Respondents were asked to indicate what, if any flexible working arrangements they had availed of in the past. Due to the survey format, respondents were only able to select a single option, there was an option to enter further details in an “other” section at the end of this questions selections. Many of the respondents entered the details of other FWA they had used. This has been incorporated into the frequency table below, see table 6.

What Flexible Working Arrangements have you availed of in the past?

Never Availed of FWA	5.26%
Job Sharing	13.16%
Parental Leave	13.16%
Shorter Working Year	13.16%
Reduced Hours	0%
Flexi time	25.31%
Working from home	26.32%
Carers leave	5.26%
Time off in Lieu	2.63%

Table 6

The most popular flexible working arrangement that respondents selected was working from home, this option was introduced during Covid 19 pandemic and has proved to increase flexibility for all staff within the civil service. It is interesting to see this option was most popular as it is the most recent addition to the flexing working options available.

Respondents were then asked if they ever suffered lost opportunities due to availing of flexible working options, 27.3% of respondents felt that they had lost out on opportunities due to using one or more of the above options. Researchers such as Enright, Golden and Williams have identified flexibility as one of the main reason women chose particular roles in the workplace. Roles that offer flexibility are often preferable as allows women to balance family responsibilities. In A Study of Gender in the Civil Service, Russell (2017) explained the lack of flexible working arrangements at senior management level was off putting. "Some interviewees highlighted their desire for a good work–life balance, which was not seen as possible at a more senior level". Using the data supplied by the respondents we can infer that the absence of flexi time at senior management level will reduce women's interest in seeking promotion to these roles and limit applications for senior management roles which require longer hours of attendance in the office. Furthermore, it is in the interest of the Civil Service to change what is seen as an obstacle by female employees. It is clear from this research and other previous bodies of research that the lack of flexibility at assistant principal level and above is a deterrent for female staff.

Respondents were asked "Is there a perceived negative impact on promotional prospects for female staff in the Civil Service if they avail of flexible working arrangements?" the purpose of this question was to confirm if the findings of Russell et al. (2019) where women felt they were penalised for taking advantage of flexible working arrangements. See table 7.

Is there a perceived negative impact on promotional prospects for female staff if they avail of FWA?

Strongly agree	18.42%
Agree	31.58%
Neither agree nor disagree	15.79%
Disagree	15.79%
Strongly disagree	5.26%

Table 7

The results show 50% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that there is a perceived negative impact on promotional prospects if you avail of flexible working arrangements. This is an area that is worthy of further research, given the high percentage of respondents that agreed with this question.

Respondents were asked if they felt there was an unconscious bias within senior management when delegating responsibility to team members, full-time staff versus part-time staff? The results are displayed in table 8 below.

Strongly agree	31.58%
----------------	--------

Agree	44.74%
Neither agree nor disagree	10.53%
Disagree	13.16%
Strongly disagree	0%

Table 8

Over 76% of women surveyed, agreed or strongly agreed that there was an unconscious bias within senior management when delegating responsibility to team members. This is a key finding as women availing of flexible working arrangements, are expecting an agreed and transparent financial penalty, there should not be other penalties applied. Some feedback in relation to this question was

- “started working part-time, 50% of my hours yet still expected to do the same workload”
- “I am never invited to offer my views or opinions on larger projects, as I take part in shorter working year and won't be in the office over the summer period”
- “left out of communications, hearing about changes in work practices from colleagues”

This treatment is down to direct line management and can vary from location to location. Women are dependent on their line manager to approve the flexible working arrangements, so will rarely complain about work practices.

Respondents were asked how flexible working arrangements impact a person's career? The results show that over 55% of respondents felt flexible working arrangements had a negative impact on a person's career. Only 2.63% of respondents felt flexible working arrangements had a positive impact on their career, and 7.89% felt that flexible working arrangements had no impact, see table 9.

Impact of flexible working arrangements on your career.

Positively	2.63%
Negatively	55.26%
No Impact	7.89%
Not Sure	34.21%

Table 9

Given that some respondents stated earlier that they did not yet have children, and 31.58% of respondents have no caring responsibilities, this may account for the “not sure” category above. This may be due to time working in the civil service as 13% of respondents have worked in the civil service for less than five years.

Respondents were then asked if flexible working arrangements were readily available and encouraged within the Irish Civil Service, the replies are outlined below in table 10.

Yes, widely available	36.84%
Available but not encouraged	44.74%

Not available	10.53%
I am not sure	7.89%

Table 10

Over 55% of respondent's stated that flexible working arrangements were either not available or available but not encouraged. Only 36.84% of respondents were able to say the option of flexible working arrangements were available to them. Given the importance of accessing flexible working arrangements to maintain a work life balance as seen in previous studies on career and caring, and work life balance (Russell, 2019. McGinnity, 2015.) having access to flexible working arrangements is essential for women to maintain a career.

Culture

The organisational culture of the Irish Civil Service has been identified previously as being a barrier to women getting a promotion. Some practices that prevented women from obtaining promotion, included lack of communication about opportunities, stereotypical attitudes about women's abilities and career aspirations, and exclusion from male networks, O'Connor (1996) and stigmas around working patterns, Kant (2021).

Respondents were asked to identify aspects of the Civil Services that they believed supported the career progression of women. The results of the survey are displayed in table 11 below.

Mentorships programmes	28.95%
Gender Equality Policies	42.11%
Training and Development programmes	63.16%
Flexible Working Arrangements	57.89%
Opportunities to learn new skills/Mobility	55.26%

Table 11

Training and development programmes received the highest score. Mentorship programmes scored 28.95%, this is due to a very limited number of mentorship programmes, which are only operated in some departments. Mentorships is an area where there is great interest from female staff, if places were available, as can be seen from the replies below. There are excellent training and development units within each department, offering in house training and financial support for external study.

Respondents were then asked what they would suggest might be improved upon, to better support to female staffs' career progression. The results suggested greater support, more training and mentoring are required. This is a sample of the replies received,

- Flexible working arrangements encouraged at higher grades, support and guidance for applications and interviews for promotional opportunities
- More encouragement and support at a local level to apply for promotion
- training opportunities

- Not just women's careers but the careers of introverts in general. I think the competitions for promotion suit those who are able to really promote/praise themselves in interview. Some promotions should be based on the individual's ability and attitude in workplace.
- Support for women returning to the workplace following maternity leave or career break.
- Better mentoring programme at local level
- I believe women's opportunities to be equal to those of men. I would prefer to see merit based promotions as opposed to gender based quotas
- Mentoring and clear progression paths, linked to training and development
- Greater support when staff have young children but still want to pursue their career
- Better mentoring while in current role to assist promotional opportunities
- More support, training when returning from maternity leave
- Assistance with promotion competition preparation made available from outside your own office or department.
- More provisions for flexi time within higher grades
- Less structured hours & ability to just get the work done which a shared understanding between management & staff
- Increased mentorship, improved use of PMDS for development
- Recognition of women during menopausal years going for promotion who might be suffering symptoms
- Better supports for women availing of flexible working arrangements. As someone who does not yet have children, I believe it would be difficult to try progress in DSP whilst availing of parents benefit, for example.
- More remote working

There is a clear demand among female staff for greater skills training and structured mentoring programmes, coupled with a greater need for support and wider availability of flexi time. Many of these issues have been identified in previous studies, interestingly the idea of a structured mentoring programme is a new suggestion. This provides insight into the hierarchical structure, which now has a greater number of females senior managers, as female employees must feel there are suitable senior staff that could mentor them. It would be a great benefit if the Civil Service was to form a network of mentees that could provide support to other women within the service.

Respondents were asked if they felt the culture of the Civil Service effected the implementation of gender equality policies in practice, the results showed over 52% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the culture of the civil service did affect how policies were implemented, see table 12 below. Only 13.26% of female staff surveyed disagreed with this. This highlights the importance of culture of an organisation, when translating policy into practice.

Strongly Agree	15.79%
Agree	31.58%
Neither agree nor disagree	39.47%
Disagree	13.26%
Strongly disagree	0%

Table 12

Respondents were asked “In your opinion is there a culture that excludes female employees from applying for roles at Assistant Principal level and above, due to the expectation of “*long hours*” and “*constant availability*” being demanded?

This type of role, is one that expects long hours of attendance and constant availability of a staff member, is referred to as greedy work. It is a phrase that was coined by Claudia Golden, a Harvard economist. Greedy work is a role that demands greater hours, is inflexible and the pay is higher than an alternative role that would not make the similar demands in relation to time and attention.

Respondents completed this question in the following way, see table 13.

Strongly agree	26.32%
Agree	34.21%
Neither agree nor disagree	21.05%
Disagree	18.42%
Strongly disagree	0%

Table 13

These figures suggest that senior management roles are viewed as greedy work by female staff. 60.57% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that roles at Assistant Principal and above are excluding women from applying for these positions due to the “greedy nature” in terms of the demands they make on a person. 21.05% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. 18.42% of respondents disagreed with the statement. No respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

The question was posed “Is the concept of 'Greedy Work' (work demanding excessive time or dedication) prevalent at in the Irish Civil Service?” The population responded at outlined in Table 14 below.

Yes, very prevalent	36.84%
Somewhat prevalent	50.00%
Not prevalent	5.26%
Not sure	7.89%

Table 14

It is clear from the above results that female staff are of the belief that greedy work is present within the Irish civil Service. Greedy work forces one parent to assume most of the caring role, as the other partner is tied to a demanding role. This causes additional stress in the relationship and can cause disruption to both parties in their workplace, (Russell and McGinnity, 2011).

Respondents were then asked, “Is Greedy Work more common in senior management grade, for example grades above Assistant Principal?” see table 15 below.

Yes	78.38%
No	21.62%

Table 15

The survey shows that 78% of staff believe greedy work is more common at senior management grades. It follows that staff employed at these grades will need to embrace this culture to excel in these roles. This perception would affect a woman's interest in applying for promotion and may cause a woman not to seek promotion to senior management grades. Given the high percentage of women with a caring responsibility, (68% in this research), it would be unrealistic to think these women would want to take on a role where they enjoyed less flexibility.

Recruitment process.

In relation to the promotion of female staff to senior management level, it was asked of respondents if they felt the attributes and skills required for senior management roles were clearly communicated, see table 16. This ties into previous research by Russell (2019) where poor communication around promotional opportunities was identified as a barrier to females seeking promotion. The results showed over 55% of respondents felt that the attributes and skills for senior management positions were not clearly communicated. Only 26.32% agreed that skills and attributes were clearly communicated. This is a key finding of the research, as research has shown that women will only apply for posts where they meet the requirements of the role. Russell (2017). found that women often feel that they must excel in relation to all the specified criteria, to apply for a promotion, whereas men will apply and see how they get on.

Yes, clearly communicated	26.32%
No, not clearly communicated	55.26%
Nor Sure	18.42%

Table 16

In relation to the language used to describe the skills and attributes required for a senior management position, respondents were asked if they felt there was gender bias in the wording used, see table 17.

The results of this question showed that 47.37% of respondents did not feel there was gender bias used in the wording of recruitment of senior management roles. Gender biases in advertisements and recruitment campaigns can be subtle and nuanced, unconscious bias by its very nature it hard to identify

by the person displaying it, as they are not aware they are doing so. Often it needs to be pointed out by a third party.

Do you feel there is gender bias in the wording of recruitments campaigns?

Yes	26.32%
No	47.37%
Don't Know	26.32%

Table 17

Some 26.32% of respondents felt that there was evidence of gender bias in the language used to describe the attributes of candidates suitable for senior management roles. Leading behavioural economist, Dr Bohnet discusses the power of unconscious bias, how it is sometimes not apparent that gender bias is at play in a work environment. If a man is self-confident and assertive, he is viewed as nice in the workplace, but if a woman displays the same attributes, she is not conforming to the stereotype of a woman and is seen as not nice. This is called the competence likability dilemma. Both male and female staff can display the same characteristics and have the same ability, but they will be viewed differently by colleagues due to unconscious bias.

Respondents were then asked, in your opinion, would the provision of flexi time at Senior Management Grades entice more women to apply for these positions? The results are displayed in table 18 below.

Strongly agree	39.47%
Agree	42.11%
Neither agree nor disagree	13.16%
Disagree	2.63%
Strongly disagree	0%

Table 18

A total of 81.58% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the provision of flexi time at senior management level would entice more women to apply for senior management positions. This is a very positive result, and a key finding of this research, as it would appear to be a straightforward change that could increase the number of female applicants for senior management positions. 13.16% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and 2.63% of respondents disagreed with the suggestion.

4.3 Social Factors

Motherhood Penalty

Respondents were asked some questions in relation to the motherhood penalty. This is a phenomenon that women in the workforce may encounter, it includes disadvantages in pay, perceived ability, and benefits relative to childless women.

Respondents were asked if they felt that motherhood significantly impacted their career progression opportunities in the Civil Service. The replies were as follows, see table 19.

Yes significantly	42.11%
Somewhat	50%
No not at all	7.89%
Not sure	0%

Table 19

Over 42.11% of respondents indicated that they felt motherhood had significantly impacted their career progression opportunities, 50% of respondents indicated that motherhood had somewhat impacted their career progression. It was asked of respondents to provide examples of penalties they have personally experienced, below are some of the examples provided.

- The ability to apply yourself to fixed hours, lack of flexibility, long hours is unreasonable and unachievable without long term issues to self or relationships
- My experience as I have been promoted is it has come at a cost in 7 years in the service, I've spent 3 of them on probation due to promotion which has meant that I haven't been able to avail of flexi working arrangements which would help my work life balance with 3 young children. It's the price I paid to avoid the motherhood penalty at a cost to time with my family
- Opting to stay at home and raise and care for the next generation impacted my career. I was at home for 15 years and find it hard still to rebuild my confidence
- I have not experienced this. I have made choices to avail of reduced hours which subsequently resulted in the reduction of pay and loss of service, but I accept that as part of work/life balance.
- unable to consider any promotion due to family commitments
- Not afforded opportunity to gain skills. Left out of big projects as taking term time or parental leave
- Maternity leave effecting service and seniority opportunities
- If you need to work part-time for childcare/financial reasons you're less likely to be included in project work, limiting your experience then for promotional purposes
- Male and single female colleagues seemed to get promoted more easily in their 20s and 30s. It was more difficult to get into the mindset for promotion when working part time as it compulsory to return to full time work upon promotion.
- Loss of pension
- Perceived negativity that a young female will be not available due to her young family commitments

There is a large range within these examples, but many of them are unfair and unethical practices, and should not be taking place in a fair work environment.

Finally in relation to the motherhood penalty, respondents were asked “Does 'Greedy Work' affect the work-life balance and career progression for women?” The results show in table 20, over 81% of survey respondents said that their work life balance and career progression has been affected by the presence of greedy work within the Irish Civil Service.

Does 'Greedy Work' affect the work-life balance and career progression for women?

Yes	81.58%
No	5.26%
Other	13.16%

Table 20

This is a key finding of this research. The intersectionality of motherhood and greedy work practices are combining to discriminate against women in the Irish Civil Service.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter I will focus on the amalgamation of data collect from my quantitative research as outlined in the previous chapters. I will synthesise and link the quantitative inquiry outcomes with previously discussed theoretical frameworks. I will discuss the key findings of my research and how they relate to previous studies. The proposed research question set out to “To investigate whether the career progression of women in the Irish Civil Service is conducted fairly and equitably”. This chapter aims to answer this question drawing on data gathered through quantitative research, and to provide insight into the issues identified via this research.

I will also discuss the limitations of this research and any implications that may arise from this study, based on acquired experience.

5.1 Key findings

The key finding in this research are as follows;

1. 68% of women survey have caring responsibilities

2. Flexible working arrangements are difficult to get approval for, and not widely available
3. 81% of respondents agreed that work life balance and career progression is affected by greedy work practices in the Irish Civil Service.
4. 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that greedy work is present in the Civil Service and 78% of respondents agreed that it is more prevalent at senior management level.
5. 55% of respondents suggested there is a need for clear communication of the skills and attributes required for senior management roles.

Caring responsibilities

Sixty eight percent of the population surveyed have caring responsibilities, this adds a level of complexity to their lives. Researchers have identified that workers with caring responsibilities will often seek roles with greater flexibility, this caring role is often filled by the woman. Goldin has carried out research in this area, and it is reflected in many research papers and her work, A grand gender convergence, (2014). Stereotypes still exist where the man is the higher earner, often with the more demanding role, and the woman adopts the caring role. This is similarly reflected in the study carried out by Enright et al, (2020) "Access to flexible working practices has been highlighted as one element of the toolkit to promote greater gender equality"

It is also noted that such access needs to be available at higher organisational levels and to be availed of by both men and women. There is more evidence that female employees use flexible, working arrangements to balance their responsibilities in relation to caring for others. Enright (2017) showed that respondents with childcare responsibilities also had significantly higher odds of previous and current participation in flexible working arrangements. There is evidence that those who availed of flexible working arrangements, felt their promotional opportunities were negatively affected. This survey showed that over 50% of the population felt there was a negative impact on promotional prospects for female staff if they availed of flexible working arrangements. Women are more likely to participate in part-time work than their male counterparts (Russell 2011). If we accept that 68% of female staff have caring responsibilities, and they depend on access to flexible working arrangements to achieve work life balance, then what message is the Irish Civil Service sending to staff if flexible working arrangements and flexi time are not available at senior management level?

Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexible working arrangements are essential for workers to achieve work life balance. Over 81% of the surveyed population want to see flexi time available at senior management level. The Civil Service offers a range of flexible working arrangements. Offering flexible working arrangements to employees is said to have a substantial and widely cited benefit to both organisations and participating individuals (Drew et al. 2003; Deven and Moss 2008). Whilst flexible working arrangements are provided for in policy, this research showed that 11% of respondents said flexible working arrangements were not available to them. A further 44% of the respondents said there was availability of flexible working arrangements, but

they were not encouraged. There is a stigma attached to flexible working arrangements, this can be seen in the survey results. The results show 50% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that there is a perceived negative impact on promotional prospects if you avail of flexible working arrangements, this coupled with 76% of women surveyed, who agreed or strongly agreed that there was an unconscious bias within senior management when delegating responsibility to team members depending on if they worked full time or part time.

Other issues that were raised in relation to women availing of flexible working arrangements, have been identified in research previously. Russell (2017) identified lack of flexibility at senior levels and no reduction in workloads when taking FWA, these issues have come up again in this research.

Greedy Work

There is resounding evidence throughout this research there is an issue with “greedy work” at senior management levels within the Irish Civil Service. 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that greedy work is present in the Civil Service and 78% of respondents agreed that it is more prevalent at senior management level. A healthy work life balance is essential for productive workforce development and maintenance. Gragnano, (2020). researched the different factors that influence work life balance, women have different needs, especially if they are juggling a caring responsibility with a career, flexibility being the main need. A recent review indicated that a better work–life balance fosters not only job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment but also life and family satisfaction. Employers provide options for flexible work to assist employees in achieving a healthy work life balance. The findings of this research show there is a disconnect between policy and practice. Flexible working arrangements are not available to all, they are not encouraged and there is a perception of having to work longer hours and always be available if you are employed at a senior management level in the Irish Civil Service. This perception will not encourage women to apply for roles at senior management levels, as it would make their working lives and caring responsibilities impossible to maintain.

5.2 Intersectionality

If we apply a feminist lens to interpreting the results of this research, we can see there is intersectionality at play. Intersectionality refers to the way different social categories, such as race, gender, class, and other identity markers, overlap and interact to create complex systems of discrimination or disadvantage. When applied to women in the workplace, particularly concerning caring responsibilities, flexible working arrangements, and greedy work, intersectionality reveals how these factors do not affect all women in the same way. Instead, the impacts are shaped by the interplay of various identities, leading to distinct experiences and challenges.

1. Caring Responsibilities:

- **Multiple Burdens:** Women often bear the brunt of caregiving responsibilities, whether for children, elderly parents, or other dependents. For women of colour, lower-income women, or immigrant women, these responsibilities can be compounded by cultural expectations, economic pressures, or lack of access to resources like affordable childcare.
- **Disproportionate Impact:** Women from marginalised groups may face greater challenges in balancing work and caregiving due to systemic inequalities. For instance, single mothers or women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds might have fewer resources or support systems, making it harder to manage both work and caregiving effectively.
- **Workplace Penalties:** Women with significant caregiving responsibilities are often perceived as less committed to their jobs, which can lead to fewer opportunities for advancement, lower pay, and being sidelined for promotions.

2. Flexible Working Arrangements:

- **Accessibility and Stigma:** While flexible working arrangements are increasingly recognised as essential for work-life balance, not all women have equal access to these options. Women in lower-paying or hourly jobs often lack the flexibility to work from home or set their hours, which are privileges more commonly available to white-collar workers.
- **Intersectional Barriers:** Women from marginalised backgrounds may face additional barriers in negotiating flexible working arrangements. For example, women of colour may encounter stereotypes that question their work ethic if they request flexibility, while immigrant women might face language barriers or cultural differences that complicate such requests.
- **Impact on Career Progression:** Even when flexible working arrangements are available, women who utilise them may face implicit penalties, such as being overlooked for promotions or important projects.

3. Greedy Work:

- **Definition:** "Greedy work" refers to jobs that demand extreme hours and availability, often making it difficult for those with significant caregiving responsibilities to succeed. Such jobs typically reward those who can devote long, uninterrupted hours, creating a bias against those who cannot.
- **Intersectional Challenges:** Women, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities, are often disproportionately affected by the demands of greedy work. Women of colour, single mothers, and those from lower-income backgrounds might find it especially challenging to meet these demands due to additional social and economic pressures.
- **Systemic Inequality:** Greedy work environments can perpetuate systemic inequality by privileging those who can conform to these demanding schedules—often white, male, and

without significant caregiving responsibilities—while penalising those who cannot, reinforcing gendered and racial disparities in the workplace.

Conclusion:

Intersectionality highlights that the challenges women face in balancing work and caregiving, accessing flexible work arrangements, and navigating greedy work environments are not uniform. Instead, these challenges are shaped by the intersection of various social identities, leading to distinct and often compounded disadvantages for women from marginalised groups. Addressing these issues requires not only recognising the specific needs and barriers faced by different groups of women but also implementing policies and practices that promote equity and inclusion in the workplace.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to “To investigate whether the career progression of women in the Irish Civil Service is conducted fairly and equitably”. This research sought insights of female civil servants, their experiences, opinions and views concerning the gendered nature of career progression in the Civil Service. A random sample quantitative survey was conducted to gather the data, this was examined alongside a review of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks.

The findings of the survey illustrate the views and opinions of female staff within the Irish Civil Service. Participants provided their views and beliefs on different aspects of women's career progression within the Civil Service. This information was broken into the areas, participants information, organisational factors, and social factors.

Participants information

The participant data gathered shows a highly educated and agile workforce, 81% hold a third level qualification, 65% have been promoted whilst working in the Civil Service and 68% of staff surveyed had a caring responsibility.

Organisational factors

The organisational data was further divided into sections, promotional competitions, flexible working arrangements and greedy work.

Firstly, in relation to promotional competitions, only 31% of the women surveyed had applied for a senior management post in the past. Several issues were identified, lack of support, lack of flexibility at

senior management grades, and no mentoring in roles. This is a need for skills/attributes and role requirements to be more clearly communicated.

Flexible working arrangements have been availed of by 95% of survey respondents. 55% of staff felt that availing of flexible working arrangements had a negative impact on your career. 76% of respondents felt there was unconscious bias from senior management when it came to delegating work and projects. Managers tended to favour full time staff over staff who were availing of flexible working arrangements. If a female staff member chose to avail of flexible working arrangements, 50% of respondents felt this would have an impact on promotional prospects. This supports previous research carried out by Russell (2017), there is a stigma towards staff who avail of flexible working arrangements.

Greedy work is present in the Civil Service, 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it exists. Over 78% of respondents agreed that greedy work is more prevalent at senior management levels. Greedy work makes it difficult for those with caring responsibilities to succeed in a role, given that 68% of respondents have caring responsibilities, this effectively discriminates against them and perpetuates systemic inequality. Many researchers have identified that women are overqualified for the role they fill, this is due to taking a role with flexibility rather than chasing the greedy work. (Drew et al. 2003). (Deven and Moss 2008). In the Civil Service there are well educated women with years of experience, staying in roles which offer flexibility rather than seeking promotion.

Social Factors

Over 42.11% of respondents indicated that they felt motherhood had significantly impacted their career progression opportunities, 50% of respondents indicated that motherhood had somewhat impacted their career progression. Motherhood can add extra burden to a woman, women with significant caregiving responsibilities are often perceived as less committed to their jobs, which can lead to fewer opportunities for advancement, lower pay, and being sidelined for promotions. Some examples of the penalty's women provided in the survey were discriminatory;

- Not afforded opportunity to gain skills. Left out of big projects as taking term time or parental leave.
- If you need to work part-time for childcare/financial reasons you're less likely to be included in project work, limiting your experience then for promotional purposes
- Maternity leave affecting service and seniority opportunities
- Perceived negativity that a young female will be not available due to her young family commitments
- Working part time but doing the same amount of work as before when I worked full time. I can't complain as I may not get the leave approved again if I do complain.

Other examples of the Motherhood penalty provided by the survey respondents were,

- My experience as I have been promoted is it has come at a cost in 7 years in the service, I've spent 3 of them on probation due to promotion which has meant that I haven't been able to avail of flexi working arrangements which would help my work life balance with 3 young children.
- Opting to stay at home and raise and care for the next generation impacted my career. I was at home for 15 years and find it hard still to rebuild my confidence
- unable to consider any promotion due to family commitments
- Male and single female colleagues seemed to get promoted more easily in their 20s and 30s. It was more difficult to get into the mindset for promotion when working part time as it compulsory to return to full time work upon promotion.
- Loss of pension

If women need their employer to provide flexibility so that they can contribute to the workplace, employers should do everything in their power to provide flexibility. Women in the Civil Service have suffered unfair distribution of work, difficulty in getting flexible working arrangements agreed. The Irish Civil Service is discriminating against female staff by not introducing flexi time at senior management levels despite it being identified as a major issue effecting woman seeking promotion to senior management roles in research carried out by Drew, (2002), Russell, (2017) and Enright, (2020).

I have concluded that the career progression of women in the Irish Civil Service is not conducted fairly and equitably. Issues that were identified over twenty years ago by Drew (2002) and subsequently by Russell (2017) and Enright (2020) are still in existence. In relation to greater flexibility being needed at senior management levels, to attract women to these positions, nothing has been done. The need for greedy work, long hours, travel and constant availability at senior management grades, make it more challenging for women with caring responsibilities to take up these roles.

I would hope that further research can be carried out on the perceived negative impact on career progression if you avail of flexible working arrangements. The results of the survey indicated that 50% of staff felt this was the case. Another area that is worthy of further research is the need for greedy work at senior management level, it is a case that workloads are too great, or is there a more efficient way to work?

Appendix A

National College of Ireland

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to identify if women who have availed of flexible working arrangements during their career in the Civil Service feel that it affected them negatively in relation to promotion, and to examine if there is a view among female employees that senior management roles are unattractive due to reduced availability of flexible working arrangements.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age, a female who has availed of flexible working arrangements in the past whilst in employment within the Civil Service.

Number of Participants and Time Commitment

This study will include approximately 35 subjects and will involve approximately twenty minutes of your time.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures will occur: You will complete an online survey, providing your lived experience.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits

The possible benefits you may experience from the procedures described in this study may include new understandings of your personal work-life balance levels, and the impact availing of flexible working arrangements may have had on your career. Otherwise, you will not directly benefit from participation in this study.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

Participation is voluntary; you may freely choose not to participate without suffering any consequences.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed at the end of data collection.

Data Storage

All research data will be stored electronically on a secure network with password protection.

Data Access

The research team and authorised National College of Ireland personnel may have access to your study records to protect your safety and welfare. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed by these entities without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Research records provided to authorised, non-NCIRL entities will not contain identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS.

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed at the top of this form.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with NCIRL. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study

Signed

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