

## National College of Ireland

### Project Submission Sheet

**Student Name:** William Moran  
**Student ID:** 22160809  
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**Lecturer:** Corina Sheerin  
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### An exploration of fatherhood penalties in the Irish labour market.

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Software that is used to find existing journals on required topics.	
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Software that transcribes audio.	
[Insert Sample prompt] <b>Audio would be uploaded.</b>	[Insert Sample response] Audio would be transcribed.

CHAT GPT	
This was used as a Dictionary and Thesaurus only, replacing Google for this task.	
[Insert Sample prompt] <b>Please define inchoate</b>	[Insert Sample response] just begun and so not fully formed or developed

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This helped convert DOI into correctly formatted references	
[Insert Sample prompt] doi:10.1111/gwao.12789	[Insert Sample response]  Atkinson, J. (2021) ‘Involved fatherhood and the workplace context: A new theoretical approach’, <i>Gender, Work &amp; Organization</i> , 29(3), pp. 845–862. doi:10.1111/gwao.12789.

## Evidence of AI Usage

The use of the tools listed above was exactly as stated.

## Additional Evidence:

N/A

## Additional Evidence:

N/A

# An exploration of fatherhood penalties in the Irish labour market

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William Moran

Master of Business Administration

This dissertation is submitted to the school of business at the  
National College of Ireland in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of a Master in Business Administration

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the under researched topic of the fatherhood penalty within the Irish labour market, focusing on C-Suite executives with four or more children. Previous research has primarily concentrated on motherhood penalties and fatherhood premiums, with limited qualitative insights into fathers' professional experiences. Quantitative studies have associated some advantages associated with fatherhood, but these findings lacked depth and failed to capture the nuanced realities of high-ranking professionals. This research aims to fill the gap by using a qualitative approach to examine how these individuals perceive the impact of fatherhood on career.

Utilising a qualitative, inductive approach, in depth interviews were conducted for this research to uncover the lived experiences and self-perceptions of these individuals. A thematic analysis focused on identifying common themes related to fatherhood and work culture as perceived by participants. These findings reveal that traditional gender norms and workplace expectations significantly influence the professional experiences of these fathers.

The major findings of the research suggest that while some fathers may benefit from a perceived stability and commitment associated with fatherhood, others face significant challenges balancing professional and family responsibilities, which can be interpreted as penalties.

The implications of this study are significant, suggesting that much work is needed in Ireland in this area so that both mothers and fathers feel supported as professionals and parents. By providing a deeper understanding of the fatherhood penalty, this research contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality in the workplace.

# Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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**Name:** William Moran

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**Degree for which thesis is submitted:** MBA

**Title of Thesis:** An exploration of fatherhood penalties in the Irish labour market

**Date:** 10.08.2024

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(*State the award and the awarding body and list the material below*)

**SIGNATURE:** *William Moran*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	Central Statistics Office
EU	European Union
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operations and Development
UK	United Kingdom

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The discourse around gender equality in the workplace has predominantly focused on the challenges faced by women, particularly mothers. The concept of the ‘motherhood penalty’, where women experience career disadvantages as a result of having children is well documented and has driven changes aimed at mitigating these impacts (Bari, 2023; Torzewska and Lovasz, 2020; Glauber, 2018; Bütikofer, Jensen & Salvanes, 2018).

Conversely, the experiences of fathers in the workplace, particularly those in high level positions, have received comparatively less attention. Despite the assumption that fatherhood typically provides benefits, known in the literature as ‘fatherhood premiums’, emerging research indicates that this narrative may be oversimplified.

Ireland presents a unique platform for examining these dynamics. Statistically, Ireland is notably behind in terms of involved fatherhood and the equitable division of childcare responsibilities. In a recent international study, it was highlighted that just 7% of unpaid childcare in Ireland is conducted by men, positioning Ireland last among 37 surveyed nations (Samman, Presler-Marshall & Jones, 2016). This stark disparity underscores the persistent traditional gender norms that influence both domestic roles and professional expectations. Within this context, it is imperative to explore how these societal norms and expectations shape the professional lives of fathers.

While much of the existing literature points to the advantages fathers might gain in their careers, this research contends that such advantages are not universal. Instead, there are nuanced penalties and challenges that fathers, particularly those with more dependents, encounter in the workplace (Bari, 2023; Kelland, Lewis & Fisher, 2022; Bygren, Erlandsson & Gähler, 2017).

However, the phenomenon of ‘fatherhood penalties’ remains largely underexplored, especially within the Irish context where cultural and societal expectations around masculinity and caregiving are entrenched (Hanlon, 2018).

This study positions itself within the broader discourse on workplace gender dynamics. Specifically, this study identifies a significant gap in understanding how fatherhood intersects with professional identity and career progression among C-Suite executives with four or more children. The extant literature overlooks the complex realities faced by these individuals, typically focusing on broad quantitative approaches. Consequently, there is a need for in-depth qualitative research that captures the lived experiences of these individuals.

The primary aim of this research is to investigate whether the fatherhood penalty exists in the Irish labour market from the perspective of C-suite executives with four or more children. The research is grounded in several key objectives:

1. To understand the self-perception of these executives regarding the fatherhood penalty in the Irish labour market.
2. To explore their views on how fatherhood impacts on:
  - (a) Professional Identity
  - (b) Workplace opportunity and earning potential

This research uses a qualitative methodology, relying on semi-structured interviews to gather rich, detailed data from participants. This approach was chosen to delve deeply into the personal and professional lives of participants, to find the insights that quantitative studies may overlook. The study aims to highlight the contradictions and conflicts of balancing traditional masculine roles with the evolving expectations of involved fatherhood and challenges the notion that fatherhood uniformly enhances career prospects, positing that while some may experience premiums, others will experience penalties.

In conclusion, this study aims to enrich understanding of how fatherhood impacts the professional lives of men in the Irish context, particularly those in leadership positions. In doing so, it is hoped that this will inform and spark more nuanced discussions and research that better support both men and women in balancing their professional and personal lives.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a framework of understanding to underpin the research questions. The review of literature beings by contextualising the issue of parenthood and the labour market. This allows for an understanding of where this research fits within the existing body of knowledge to be illustrated. In order to understand the experiences of fathers within the labour market, the focus then moves to organisations, the gendered nature of same and the influence of hegemonic masculinity and gendered organisations on the experiences of parents at work. Thereafter attention shifts to fatherhood penalties with issues of family size, workplace opportunity and earning potential considered. Here, appraisal of these issues vis-à-vis the motherhood penalty are also explored. This is important in terms of understanding both the similarities and differences which mothers and fathers face. The next section of the review examines perceptions of fatherhood at work, organisational culture, career trajectories and selection. This is essential in gaining understanding of the nuanced issues facing fathers as they advance their careers. Finally, we evaluate the extant literature concerning fatherhood and professional identity. Here, issues such as organisational logic, the breadwinner versus neo-liberal understandings of fatherhood, as well as issues of multiplicity at work are examined. Through synthesis of these key aspects of the literature we gain essential insights and understandings regarding the fatherhood penalty as well as fatherhood and professional identity and workplace opportunities.

#### 2.1.1 PARENTHOOD AND THE LABOUR MARKET

To date much research has focused upon workplace gender inequality from the perspective of the mother. However, the lesser researched area of fatherhood has garnered traction in recent years as the proliferation of egalitarian, family focused policies increase, with typical conventions being challenged by the emergence of research displaying that parenthood has a negative impact on employment chances for fathers also (Kelland, Lewis & Fisher, 2022; Bygren, Erlandsson & Gähler, 2017).

Furthermore, studies have emerged that display links between family size and workplace opportunity (Bari, 2023). The central statistics office reported in 2022 that there are 862,171 families residing in Ireland, of which 62,192 were families with four or more children (CSO, 2020). Despite these large numbers, just 7% of unpaid childcare is conducted by the father in Ireland, meaning Ireland ranks 37/37 nations studied. (Samman et al., 2016). To put this in context, fathers in Sweden, the nation atop this research, conduct 37% of unpaid childcare and fathers in the United Kingdom, our closest neighbours, conduct 32% of unpaid childcare.

Running contrary to the research of premiums & penalties are research papers on the phenomena of selection, in which Mari (2019) postulates that men select into fatherhood when successful, not that they become successful because they are fathers.

Crucial to this research field is the clash of two distinct and separate male identities that are conflicted when men become fathers. The traditional masculine trope of the breadwinner and the neo-liberal identity of the involved father (Stellner, 2022; Atkinson, 2021; Humberd et al., 2014).

Humberd et al. (2014) postulated that although respondents in their research believed they were involved fathers, they also held on to traditional tropes of the 'breadwinner' or 'company man' in an organisational context which intertwined with a feeling of masculinity. There appears to be a deep-rooted internal conflict in this context that makes stepping away from the company man identity a difficult thing to do (Hanlon, 2018).

Issues of professional identity and in particular how this impacts father's self-perception is essential to understanding fatherhood penalties. While some quantitative research has addressed this question, such as work from Steffens, Preuß, and Scheifele (2019) who explore fatherhood penalties for primary caregivers, they do not and cannot fully reflect the complexity of the issue. As such, qualitative studies of this nature are essential in order to gain a holistic understanding of the fatherhood penalty. This research addresses the gap and allows for a deeper examination of the lived experience of fathers, focusing on the fatherhood penalty and the related and overlapping themes of identity and care that are crucial to understanding the phenomena of workplace premiums and penalties.



### 2.1.2 HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY, GENDERED ORGANISATIONS AND PARENTHOOD

Hegemony in this respect refers to the cultural acceptance and stabilisation of unfair and unbalanced gender relations that have fostered patriarchal systems and gendered social relations, thus allowing men's dominance over women to continue, while also recognising that there is a hierarchy among men (Connell et al., 2023; Gatrell et al., 2022).

Hegemony in gender relations includes hegemony over other men as well as women (Connell et al., 2023). In psychology, hegemonic masculinity originally was conceptualised as a hierarchy amongst multiple masculinities, and it is within this hierarchy that the clash of breadwinner and neo liberal involved father is rooted (Connell et al., 2023; Gatrell et al., 2022).

These cultures of masculine hegemony in the workplace can create barriers to paternal involvement for fathers who wish to 'double down on their daddy duties' (Gatrell et al., 2022, p.1200). Men who sought deeper engagement with their children displayed more family-oriented desires but were left frustrated by organisational and societal assumptions that paid work should be the priority for all fathers and that fathers should neither need nor desire flexible work arrangements (Burnett et al., 2013). To the point that some recounted being discouraged or penalised by co-workers and the attitudes of executive leaders as organisational perceptions of fatherhood are inextricably linked to hegemonic ideals of the breadwinner identity (Gatrell et al., 2022).

Connell et al. (2023) highlight the importance of recognising masculine hegemony, as it shapes men's experiences of workplace culture related to fatherhood. This entrenched societal expectation perpetuates conflicts between fatherhood and employment. However, work from Connell et al. (2023) pertaining to hegemonic masculinity has been disputed by Reddy, Sharma and Jha (2019) who explore criticisms of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and point toward opportunities for change in the gender based social structure.

### 2.1.3 GENDER, PENALTIES AND PREMIUMS

To date motherhood has been the dominant focus of extant literature examining the relationship between parenthood and employment. Within the discourse, the gender gap and in particular motherhood penalties and issues of gender and care have dominated

international literature (Bari, 2023; Torzewska and Lovasz, 2020; Glauber, 2018; Bütikofer, Jensen & Salvanes, 2018).

A component of these studies, but not the focus of, has been the concept of a fatherhood premium. This has widened the gender gap, making it more pronounced amongst men compared to those without children. Generally, these perceived differences are attributed to employer discrimination, although, disentangling or proving discrimination is a real challenge (Glauber, 2018; Bygren et al., 2017).

Within existing empirical research concerning parenthood and labour prospects, the patterns of motherhood penalties and fatherhood premiums will typically appear. That is, parenthood will positively affect a man's earning potential and negatively affect a woman's (Icardi et al., 2021; Torzewska & Lovasz, 2020; Glauber 2018).

For example, Icardi et al. (2021), in their extensive study across a range of countries revealed that a positive relationship between fatherhood and earning potential in Britain, Finland, and Germany was apparent. The sample for this research consisted of men aged 20-45. The UK, a close neighbour of Ireland and the only English-speaking country in the sample displayed a 13% fatherhood premium.

### 2.1.3 FATHERHOOD PENALTIES

More recently, attention has been placed upon fatherhood and in particular, the impact fatherhood has on earning potential and career opportunity compared with previous studies on motherhood (Kelland, Lewis & Fisher, 2022; Bygren et al., 2017). This lesser researched area at the cross section of fatherhood and career is where the breadth and focus of this research has been centred.

In examining whether the fatherhood penalty exists, some interesting insights emerged from the literature. For example, Bygren et al. (2017) examined the existence of employer discrimination using a novel empirical field test approach. The field test developed fictional candidates of equal strength and experience and these candidates were put forward for live positions on the real-world jobs market. The results found that employers did not participate in discrimination based on gender or parenthood status, at least not in a statistically significant way. The results are interesting both from a European perspective, the study was conducted in Sweden, and in that it challenges the

concept of the fatherhood premium in the workplace. The results indicated a hierarchy of successful candidates as follows: 1. Childless Men (41.6%), 2. Childless Women (39.2%), 3. Fathers (39.1%) and finally 4. Mothers (36.4%).

This study supports the theory that mothers are penalised, but also highlights the lesser considered issue of fatherhood. Their research reveals that parenthood has a negative impact on employment chances for fathers. Do these findings perhaps identify that a father may be perceived differently by employers and as a result, experience a fatherhood penalty, as was identified by Berdahl & Moon (2013) who found that fathers who took on a large proportion of childcare experienced a 'fatherhood penalty'.

Steffen et al. (2019) investigated the existence of such a fatherhood penalty, concluding that expected family roles and the workplace perceptions of these expected family roles can determine whether parenthood penalties exist. This research was based on the premise that people sometimes derive impressions of individuals contingent purely on the social groups they belong to. When this premise is applied to the workplace, work related impression formation occurs, and can eventually lead to discrimination and motherhood and fatherhood penalties (Steffen et al., 2019). Cook, O'Brien, Connolly, Aldrich & Speight (2021) found that altered work related perception of parents was more widely reported by men than women in the UK Household Survey 2020.

Steffen et al. (2019) linked this perceptual change to tangible changes such as fathers requesting more flexible working arrangements to facilitate the fulfilment of caregiving roles in the home. Steffen et al. (2019) research revealed that the penalties experienced may not be gender based (women v men) but rather stem from the expected family roles (breadwinner v caregiver) and it is this distinction that determines who is impacted by workplace penalties pertaining to parenthood. This was also observed by Ladge et al. (2015) who found career advancement and income were both restricted for respondents who made public their intentions to prioritise childcare over employment.

Further research by Kelland, Lewis & Fisher (2022) found that caregiving fathers were subject to fatherhood 'forfeits', which appeared in the form of workplace mistreatment such as being viewed suspiciously, subjected to mockery & conceptualisation of being idle. Although there is no explicit link in this research to earning potential, it is implicit that earning potential would be affected as a consequence of the drastic shift in treatment

and perception by peers stating they may be 'less likely to be successful' (Kelland et al., 2022, p.1587).

When implicit social-role assumptions suggest that a parent takes on caregiver roles, then typically it is this parent, irrespective of gender, that experiences parenthood penalties. Therefore, wherever the considerable demands of family commitments rest, the workplace penalties typically follow (Steffen et al., 2019).

#### 2.1.4 FAMILY SIZE AND THE IRISH PERSPECTIVE

Exploration of parenthood, care, and penalties from an Irish perspective has been limited, and most papers that do consider the issues of premiums and penalties are somewhat outdated. However, Bari (2023) in her recent work did identify and explore the impact of parenthood on wages from an Irish perspective and indeed, even focused on how family size can impact the earning potential of mothers and fathers together. However, the timing of the research, conducted during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic was constrictive, and the research focused solely on the female perspective. Hence, the experiences of men in the labour market with respect to fatherhood, earning and career potential and identity warrant consideration.

Ireland traditionally is a patriarchal culture where the traditional 'breadwinner' role has resided. However, social shifts have seen understandings of 'the family' and the roles of parents evolve over time as the concurrent changing of social roles and government policy pertaining to fathers, such as paid and unpaid parental leave, take effect. Therefore, the earner-carer relationship for parents has become ever more complex in recent years (Hanlon, 2018; Hanlon & Lynch, 2012) and a complex marriage of male identities, breadwinner, and the involved father has begun to emerge (Baranowska-Rataj & Matysiak, 2022; Bygren et al., 2017; Humberd et al., 2014). The literature suggests that as family size increases, this can negatively affect labour market outcomes for the father as demands for care giving increase in the home and subsequently, the employers perception of the father's ability to commit is altered (Baranowska-Rataj & Matysiak, 2022).

Despite increasing labour force participation in Ireland, the care burden and in particular childcare remains a female preserve with most of the burden laying at the feet of the

mother, with earner-carer relationships becoming further complicated as family size increases (Bari, 2023). Despite the fact there are 62,192 families residing in Ireland with four or more children (CSO, 2022), this aspect of our culture has remained entrenched. With both parents now actively fulfilling the earner role in Ireland, the mother typically remains responsible for much of the carer role (Hanlon, 2018; Hanlon & Lynch, 2011). Hanlon (2012) discusses how traditional breadwinner ideologies are entrenched in Ireland to the point that women are defined as care givers in the constitution, despite the ascent of women in the professional and academic spheres. A position that was upheld in an Irish national referendum on family and care put to the voting public in March 2024.

In most families both parents are in full time work with Eurostat (2020) citing 72% & 90% employment for mothers and fathers respectively across the EU. Therefore, the traditional norms are no longer valid, but the earner-carer relationships typically endure in Ireland which has taken a conservative stance, foreclosing care as a private responsibility that is the responsibility of the female (Hanlon & Lynch, 2011). Involved fatherhood is a prevalent topic, but attitudinal shifts have not been met with legislative change to provide a pathway for working parents to work and care equally.

It is important to note that while much of the literature would indicate that Ireland has shifted toward generous and progressive parental policies (Bari, 2023; Walsh & Murphy, 2021) that this is contradicted by evidence from a recent OECD study, explored to identify how progressive Ireland was as a nation with respect to parental supports. It was found that despite Ireland having longstanding measures in place, Ireland in fact ranks 27th of 30 OECD and EU countries for development and implementation of parental policies (Chzhen, Gromada and Rees., 2019).

Indeed, statistically, Ireland is far from progressive with respect to involved fatherhood and the division of care. In a recent international survey Ireland ranked 37/37 nations with just 7% of unpaid childcare conducted by the male, meaning a staggering 93% rests with the mother. Sweden ranked first in this study with women undertaking 63% of childcare responsibilities. The average across the study was 75% (Samman, Presler-Marshall & Jones 2016). Ireland is positioned below Iraq, South Africa, and Benin at the foot of the table.

## 2.2 FATHERHOOD AND WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITY AND EARNING POTENTIAL

The relationship between fatherhood and workplace opportunity and earning potential has traditionally been framed through the concept of fatherhood premiums, where employed fathers are often perceived to receive benefits over their childless male counterparts and mothers. This phenomenon is well documented, with research indicating that fathers typically experience enhanced earning potential and greater workplace opportunity (Bari, 2023; Icardi et al., 2021; Fuller & Cooke, 2018). However, as societal perceptions of fatherhood evolve from the traditional breadwinner model to a more involved, neo-liberal conception of fatherhood, these dynamics may be shifting (Baranowska-Rataj & Matysiak, 2022; Hanlon, 2018).

In examining C-Suite executives in Ireland, this study aims to uncover whether the fatherhood premium persists or if a fatherhood penalty is emerging, particularly for those with four or more children. Existing research suggests that these high-level executives experience profound shifts in professional identity when becoming fathers, more so than their working-class counterparts (Humberd et al., 2014; Plantin, 2007). This research seeks to determine if these identity changes impact their perceived and actual workplace opportunities and earning potential.

While traditional views suggest positively affects a man's career, some studies challenge this notion. Bygren et al. (2017) found that fatherhood can negatively impact employment prospects, indicating that employers may view fathers differently, potentially reducing their workplace opportunities and earning potential.

### 2.2.1 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND PERCEPTIONS OF FATHERHOOD

A deep-rooted cultural institutionalism that positions mothers as carers and fathers as earners, inhibits both parents in both their professional and parental lives. Mothers, on whom the burden of care still lies, are prohibited from fully immersing themselves in professional lives, while fathers are constrained from fully adopting the involved father role and caring responsibilities that they may yearn for (Hanlon, 2018).

For larger families however, is there a tipping point where the demand for caregiving in the home becomes so large, that perceptions of the earner-carer dynamic shifts? (Bari, 2023).

As identified by Cook et al. (2021) how these perceptions manifest in the workplace is a lesser-known area, with existing research often falling short with respect to qualitative insight. This poses the question whether there is a tipping point, whereby perceptions of the working father shift to the extent that involved fathers of larger families are perceived differently and incur fatherhood penalties with respect to earning potential and career opportunities in a similar vein to what research has proven to be empirically true: females are penalised heavily professionally for adopting into motherhood (Icardi et al., 2021; Torzewska and Lovasz, 2020; Bygren et al., 2017).

A philosophical question may be: Do egalitarian policies only serve to reach equal opportunity in the workplace by penalising fathers in the long run by inflicting similar parenting penalties upon them, reducing their opportunity, and earning potential, rather than closing the gender gap by increasing earning potential for mothers?

### 2.2.2 CAREER TRAJECTORIES AND SELECTION

One recurrent counter argument to fatherhood premiums or penalties found throughout the research has been the concept of selection (Icardi et al., 2021; Mari, 2019).

Selection is an area that has been diligently researched and is often cited as an argument within academic papers discussing premiums or penalties. Mari (2019) focuses directly on the theme of selection and posits that the relationship between fatherhood and earning potential is not causal, but rather, a case of selection.

Selection suggests that males are successful professionally and financially first, or on an upward trajectory, and that it is at this point in their lives they choose or 'select' into fatherhood. This is an important concept in this field as it directly contradicts the notions of fatherhood premiums or penalties.

The concept of a fatherhood premium postulates that a male becomes more successful because they are a father, whereas the concept of selection postulates that a male

becomes a father because they are successful. These diametric theories may have led to biases in the research as findings across competing papers have been inconsistent. Mari (2019) pointed toward a 1-2% fatherhood premium in the UK, while Icardi et al. (2021) research showed a 13% fatherhood premium in the UK. Both research teams used similar quantitative methods, in the same geographical area, so the wide difference in results points to a gap in the research that qualitative analysis and understanding may help bridge.

However, Mari (2019) conducted their study prior to the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic and Icardi et al. (2021) conducted their study during the pandemic, so this must be considered as a factor when analysing the results of their research.

These contrarian theories and conflicting findings are pertinent to this research question as any research into fatherhood premiums or penalties, must consider the concept of selection completeness and accuracy.

### 2.3 FATHERHOOD AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

As fathers navigate the journey of career and fatherhood, it is not just earning potential and the concept of premiums or penalties that becomes complicated. The clash of two distinct and separate male identities come to the fore. The traditional masculine trope of the breadwinner and the neo-liberal identity of the involved father.

Stellner (2022) describes this as the re-elaboration of the paternal role, citing drivers such as altering social settings, family arrangements and policy changes leading to men being more involved as fathers and thus, resulting in similar work family conflicts as for women. Humberd et al. (2014) also discuss how the expectations of a father at home and the expectations of a father in the workplace are contrary and may lead to a conflicting and complicated sense of identity for fathers. Shifting societal norms for fathers mean it is more 'normal' to be very involved with their children than previous generations, while traditional workplace norms create an environment where fathers may feel stifled and uncomfortable when it comes to discussing or accommodating their responsibilities as fathers in the workplace.



As society attempts to rebalance gender inequality in the workplace, Bataille & Carlison (2017) discuss how as policies are developed and implemented to ensure mothers can work and work for fair pay, there has in fact never been a more important moment to take working fathers roles as caregivers seriously as we now see the proliferation of families with two breadwinners and two involved parents.

#### 2.3.1 ORGANISATIONAL LOGIC AND CULTURE; FATHERHOOD AND FITTING IN

Organisations have typically lagged behind policy change and public discourse pertaining to involved fatherhood and have in instances been shown to discourage or penalise new fathers who commit to the involved father, caregiver role. (Atkinson, 2021). Therefore, fathers who aspire to take on the involved fatherhood role fully, face the dilemma of whether they reject the breadwinner role and lean into the fatherhood identity, or maintain the breadwinner role, compromising involvement at home and concealing their caring responsibilities at work (Atkinson, 2021; Tanquerel & Grau Grau, 2020).

Research from Tanquerel & Grau Grau (2020) indicates that fathers predominantly choose, in varying degrees of reluctance, to persist with their breadwinner identities at work as there is a tacit expectation from the organisation that they will do so.

Ibarra (2023) researched many managers who either had already or were in the process of making a significant career change. One important commonality between respondents was all experienced a subjective feeling of having reached a crossroad that to pass, would require significant personal change, a seismic shift.

Perhaps the significant personal change of fatherhood should be considered more earnestly by men and their employers with respect to how it impacts career, earning potential and self-identity. If one must keep the breadwinner & involved father identities separate, can one ever be truly successful at either when there is such an actual or perceived opportunity cost with revealing fatherhood identities to those in the workplace that exclusively know the breadwinner self.

When considering whether the perception of involved fathers changes for them in some way in the workplace, it is versus the traditional 'breadwinner' or 'company man' identity that this new 'involved father' identity predominantly clashes.

Indeed, Ibarra (2023) further discussed that the period preceding change from a career perspective typically have the characteristics of uncertainty, turmoil, and confusion. These characteristics are certainly applicable to the male experience when first attempting to balance the multiplicity of identities than exist within them as professionals and fathers. Indeed, Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper & Sparrow (2013) describe fathers in the workplace as 'ghosts in the organisational machine', as the transition to fatherhood tends not be acknowledged at organisational level. The ongoing expectation to prioritise work above all else as per breadwinner norms and the reluctance of organisations to recognise fatherhood as a significant life event are major barriers preventing men from becoming more involved fathers (Atkinson, 2021; Harrington, 2021).

### 2.3.2 BREADWINNER VERSUS NEOLIBERAL DAD

Respondents in research by Humberd et al. (2014) that believed they were involved fathers, also held on to traditional tropes of the 'breadwinner' or 'company man' in an organisational context which intertwined with a feeling of masculinity. There appears to be a deep-rooted internal conflict in this context that makes stepping away from the company man identity a difficult thing to do. (Harrington, 2021; Humberd et al., 2014)

Harrington (2021) revealed that fathers tended to defend the traditional notion of the working father, which at an individual level, helped reduce their internal conflict with their own identities, but at a macro level, only feeds into maintaining the 'breadwinner' or 'company man' ideology that presents such a barrier to men everywhere who wrestle with the two identities of provider and involved fatherhood.

Men struggle to discuss involved fatherhood and the demands of caregiving in the workplace as the internal perception is that this may be perceived as a weakness or taboo (Hanlon, 2012). Therefore, the pressure of workplace norms may inhibit the development of a man's identity as a father, as they are restricted from flourishing as a father in their workplace environment (Bataille & Carlison, 2017; Humberd et al., 2014). However, Kagnas and Lamsa (2020) observed that despite this, managers generally endorse parental work-life balance and actively encourage new fathers to take parental leave, but also note that the traditional ideal worker/breadwinner narratives coexist with

these supportive attitudes, leading to the continued dominance of gendered parenting norms, where fathers are seen as the secondary parent.

Ibarra (2023) explores this further discussing how to reach a point of professional and personal balance will take effort and a time, a transformational change. Simply wearing different hats at home and in work will not bring joy and fulfilment in either role.

Ibarra (2023) articulates this succinctly when discussing how our typical, stock position pertaining to who we are and how others expect us to behave can undermine us in a whole host of ways.

When a man adopts into fatherhood, our preconceived notions around what is a good worker and what is acceptable at work with respect to fatherhood lead to no action being taken and an almost paralysis ensues where these identities are held as distinct and separate entities, undermining involved fathers, with an unsubstantiated belief that this goes against the traditional masculine trope of the breadwinner. Whilst all the while undermining ourselves as professionals, holding back from exploring these new feelings and experimenting with change. Indeed, fathers who wish to express their commitment to being actively involved in parenting may hesitate to do so in a workplace setting. This reluctance is due to the prevailing concept of hegemonic masculinity (Atkinson, 2021). Therefore, “achieving involved fatherhood involves challenging deeply engrained behaviours and established notions of fatherhood and masculinity” (Atkinson, 2021).

### 2.3.3 SELF PERCEPTION, MULTIPLICITY OF FATHERHOOD AT WORK

Fatherhood is distinct from other examples of multiplicity, identity, or role change, such as occupation or relationships, as fatherhood is an irreversible event (Bleidorn, Buyuckcan-Tetik, Schwaba, Van Scheppingen, Denissen & Finkenauer, 2016). Nevertheless, the ‘breadwinner’ continues to be expected to perform and behave unencumbered professionally following their journey into fatherhood, despite the seismic shift in responsibility outside of it (Bataille & Carlison, 2017; Humberd et al., 2014). Even fathers who epitomise involved fatherhood initially following the birth of their children tend to revert to the stereotypical breadwinner role once the pressures of work return and an inherent tension between the two identities surfaces (Atkinson, 2021).

On this theme of balancing the two identities, respondents in research conducted by Ibarra (2023) found that only through experimentation and ultimately, a change of career and environment where they able to find a balance between working life and becoming a mother. Parenthood and career at that exact moment were not, in fact, compatible. However, that did not mean that an environment could not be cultivated through experimentation, that provided a more holistic experience that satisfied both the heart and the mind, the mother, and the professional identity.

Humberd et al. (2014) do explore the multiplicity of identities fathers experience across home and work live and the tensions deriving therein, but they did so with relatively new fathers. Our sampling allows us to build on this and investigate whether this multiplicity is sustained or resolved as fathers age and success grows.

When considering fathers at directorate or C-Suite level, research has indicated that they experience a more extreme change regarding their perception of self than working class peers, viewing fatherhood as a chance to develop and explore themselves and their identity rather than an explicit goal in itself (Humberd et al., 2014; Plantin 2007). Stellner (2022) further supports this noting for C-Suite fathers, fatherhood can lead to positive changes in transformational leadership behaviours as fathers adjust to differing role expectations and experience a shift in perceptions and priorities.

Specifically, Stellner (2022) discusses inter-role transfer, whereby C-suite fathers who undertake multiple roles will experience some conflict, but ultimately, competency enrichment in the multiple roles will typically outweigh the internal conflict felt. It is suggested that the reason this inter-role transfer is more profound for fathers in leaderships positions, due to similarities in leadership and fatherhood such as responsibility for others, motivation, support, and corrective disciplinary actions.

One contrasting view can be found in research by Bleidorn et al. (2016) who observed a reduction in self-esteem by persons transitioning to parenthood, which for men in leadership positions could have a detrimental effect.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the evolving perceptions of fatherhood and its impact on workplace opportunity and earning potential present a complex landscape for working fathers here in Ireland. While the traditional notions of the fatherhood premium suggest that fathers benefit from increased earnings and opportunities, emerging research challenges these assumptions. The shift towards a more involved and neo-liberal view of fatherhood may be reshaping these dynamics, potentially leading to a fatherhood penalty.

Studies indicate that fatherhood significantly influences professional identity, particularly for high level executives, and these changes may affect career trajectory (Humber et al., 2014; Plantin, 2007). Moreover, contrary to conventional belief some research highlights the negative impact of fatherhood on employment prospects, suggesting that employers may view fathers less favourably (Bygren et al., 2017).

This research aims to delve deeper into these issues by examining the self-perception of C-Suite fathers in Ireland, offering a qualitative perspective that compliments existing quantitative data. By understanding how these fathers navigate their professional roles amidst changing societal expectations, a more nuanced understanding can be gained of the intersection fatherhood, identity, and career success.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTION

The research aim seeks to explore whether the fatherhood penalty exists in the Irish labour market. Specifically, the research examines if and how a fatherhood penalty is experienced by C-Suite fathers of four or more children.

The following research objectives support the research aim:

### **1.1 To understand the self-perception of C-Suite executives with four or more children, about the fatherhood penalty in the Irish labour market.**

Typically, research in this area has pointed toward a fatherhood premium for employed fathers over both their childless male counterparts and mothers (Bari., 2023; Icardi et al., 2021; Fuller and Cooke., 2018). However, it is important to consider that as the paradigm of the male 'breadwinner' in the home has over time, shifted toward a more neo-liberal perception of involved fatherhood, that this in turn may impact experiences in the labour market for fathers (Baranowska-Rataj & Matysiak, 2022; Hanlon, 2018). This study proposes to review the attitudes towards fathers in employment in Ireland through an examination of the self-perception of C-Suite executives about the fatherhood penalty in the Irish labour market.

### **1.2 Explore the view amongst these fathers regarding the impact of fatherhood on their professional lives in relation to:**

**(a) Professional identity.**

**(b) Workplace opportunity and earning potential.**

#### **Professional Identity**

When considering fathers at C-Suite level, research has indicated that they experience a more extreme change regarding their perception of self than working class peers from becoming a father (Humberd et al., 2014; Plantin 2007).

Whereas as Humberd et al. (2014) do explore the multiplicity of identities fathers experience across their home and work lives and the tensions deriving therein, they did so with relatively new fathers.

Our sampling allows us to build on this and investigate whether this multiplicity is sustained or resolved as fathers age and careers progress.

As perceptions and expectations of fathers' shift, how do fathers working at directorate level manage their identities as fathers whilst performing leadership roles and does their professional life shape how they experience their identities as fathers?

### **Workplace Opportunity and earning potential**

Previous research of parenthoods impact on labour prospects indicates that patterns of motherhood penalties and fatherhood premiums will typically appear. That is, parenthood will positively affect a man's earning potential and opportunity, while negatively affecting a woman's (Icardi et al., 2021; Torzewska & Lovasz, 2020; Glauber 2018).

However, field tested research from Bygren et al. (2017) indicated that this may not be the case and highlights the lesser considered issue of fatherhood, revealing that parenthood has a negative impact on employment chances for fathers also.

Do these findings perhaps identify that a father may be perceived differently by employers and see workplace opportunities and earning potential impacted as a result?

This research contributes to closing the gap in the literature, as it examines whether changing societal policies and perception have shifted the paradigm of fatherhood premiums towards penalties in the Irish labour market.

This qualitative research gives voice and weight to the previous quantitative research in this field, that allows for a deeper examination of the lived experience, focusing also on the overlapping themes of identity and care that are crucial to understanding the phenomena of workplace premiums and penalties.

A detailed methodology chapter will outline the research design and methods used to explore these dynamics. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on gender, work, and family, highlighting and acknowledging the diverse experiences of fathers in the workplace.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Dudovskiy (2022) describes methodology as the framework that connects selected methods to the research goals, offering justification for the researcher's decisions. This chapter intends to explain the chosen methodology and provide reasons to support these decisions. What we have decided and why we have decided it.

This chapter will discuss the philosophical foundations of the research and the approach used to effectively answer the research question. Details on the sampling technique, data collection method, and analysis technique will be included. Additionally, ethical considerations, limitations and the validity and reliability of the research will be considered.

The 'research onion' framework by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) was used to develop the research methodology. This framework outlines the layers and stages of the research process, viewing it as the unwrapping of layers, during which a research methodology can be revealed and defined. It highlights different research approaches and emphasises the importance of recognising which are appropriate, therefore influencing both the research strategy and methods chosen and providing context for why they were chosen (Saunders et al., 2019).

### 4.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Research philosophy is the set of beliefs or worldview concerning the phenomenon being investigated and how the data pertaining to that topic should be gathered, analysed, and utilised (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The research philosophy forms the foundation of this study and has acted as a steer for all other choices related to research design. Saunders et al. (2019) describe research philosophy as assumptions about one's own view of the world, which underpin a researcher's strategy and methods.

In the context of business, leadership and fatherhood, the complexity of the social world necessitates a carefully chosen research philosophy. Saunders et al. (2019) argue that rich insights are needed in such complex areas of investigation, making interpretivism a suitable philosophy for this study.



Interpretivism is typically associated with qualitative research and posits that reality is subjective, shaped by individual perceptions. Researchers must understand the differences between humans as social actors, who interpret and enact roles based on their unique individual perspectives. The philosophy has roots in phenomenology, which deals with how we make sense of the world, and symbolic interactionism, which involves interpreting and adjusting to the social world continuously (Saunders et al., 2019).

An interpretivist approach requires the researcher to adopt an empathetic stance, attempting to understand the perspectives of their subjects. The choice of research philosophy is influenced by the research question and an interpretivist approach is deemed most appropriate for fatherhood penalty and identity research due to the complexity and uniqueness of each father's experiences and each father's view of the world, which are influenced by specific circumstances and interactions at particular points in time (Saunders et al., 2019; Thanh and Thanh, 2015).

Alharahsheh & Pius (2020) and Thanh & Thanh (2015) note that interpretivism allows researchers to view the world through participants' perceptions, acknowledging that reality and knowledge are subjective and shaped by individual and environmental factors such as those experienced by the fathers in this study. Weber (2004) adds that interpretivists understand knowledge as being constructed from experiences, culture, and history. All of which are factors that influence the experiences and decision-making processes of the fathers in this study.

In summary, the interpretivist research philosophy is central to qualitative work, emphasising subjective reality and the importance of understanding individuals' perspectives and social contexts. Therefore, it aligns with the complexity and uniqueness of this multifaceted research area where understanding the unique interplay of fatherhood, career and self-perception is crucial.

#### 4.3 APPROACH AND DESIGN

This research will utilise an inductive approach which focuses on the identification of patterns that lead to the formulation of explanations that help researchers gain an understanding of the issue being examined (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018; Barnham,

2015). The inductive method allows for the development of new theories from the data collected as opposed to relying on pre-existing theories. In other words, with the inductive approach you are not testing theory, you are building theory. This means that there is no initial framework guiding data collection, and the theory is derived post-data collection (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018).

Saunders et al. (2019) argue that it is at this juncture where new theories emerge, while at the same time acknowledging that it is possible that data may also align with existing theories.

Typically employed in qualitative research, the inductive approach involves conducting interviews on specific topics in order to gather data that helps comprehend the issue at hand. This process enables the researcher to make generalisations that culminate in theory development (Saunders et al., 2019).

Gerson (2022) suggests that the gathered data and insights are then analysed for patterns amongst respondents, which aid in understanding their perspectives. For this reason, the inductive approach is an appropriate approach to aid in answering the following research objective, which focuses on self-perception:

*1.1 To understand the self-perception of C-Suite executives with four or children, about the fatherhood penalty in the Irish labour market.*

The inductive approach differs from a deductive approach, that typically uses existing knowledge or pre-existing theory to develop a hypothesis, which is then proven or disproven through a research approach of rigorous empirical scrutiny and testing (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Many of the existing studies in this field have used quantitative methods to develop current theories and discussions relying on quantitative, scale-based methods.

Although some qualitative papers exist, they are much fewer in number.

However, a small but growing number of studies focus on smaller, more intensive group analysis (Connell, Wedgwood & Wood, 2023). These qualitative studies enhance the quantitative research by providing a deeper exploration of lived experiences, particularly

concerning the overlapping themes of identity and care, which are essential to understanding workplace premiums and penalties.

Plowman & Smith (2011) emphasise that qualitative research focuses on the examination of topics that resist scale-based, statistical analysis, aiming instead to interpret meaning, viewpoints, or experiences from the participants perspectives.

Saunders et al. (2019) further explains that qualitative research is employed to comprehend the underlying reasons behind particular decisions, behaviours, attitudes and opinions.

Finally, Plowman & Smith (2011) acknowledge that men are under-represented in qualitative management studies when compared to non-qualitative research.

This qualitative, inductive research was approached with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a philosophy and method of inquiry that enables a deeper understanding on the lived experiences of human beings (Qutoshi, 2018).

A phenomenological approach is well suited for inductive, qualitative research because of its focus on understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals, allowing for the emergence of deep, rich insights without the need for pre-conceived hypothesis. With an emphasis on participants subjective realities, it is an appropriate fit for the exploration of the lived experiences and self-perceptions of fathers in this study and the development of theories grounded in real world observations and experiences.

Finally, a key consideration pertaining to research design is the time horizon. The time horizon for this study is cross sectional, as all data has been collected at one point in time. This is suitable as Saunders et al. (2019) state, cross-sectional approaches provide insight into a moment in time of a phenomenon. Although the benefit of a longitudinal study can be seen, this was not practical given the timeframe.

#### 4.4 RESEARCH METHOD

Saunders et al. (2019) suggest that the selection of tools and techniques for data collection and analysis, as well as the chosen method and strategy, should be guided by the philosophical and research approach.

When deciding on a data collection strategy, previous research findings and assumptions have influenced the chosen methodology, enabling the researcher to construct an interview framework based on the emerging themes from the literature review.

The reviewed literature used both quantitative and qualitative methods to develop current theories and perceptions in this field. However, to address the topics outlined in the research question and sub objective, a single or mono method of semi structured interviews was considered most suitable, as this method focuses on exploring subjective topics and give voice to the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants.

Moreover, due to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the research topic, employing a dynamic and flexible data collection method is essential. Semi-structured interviews, as described by Saunders et al. (2019) provide a qualitative approach where themes and questions guide the conversation, while also allowing for probing to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses.

Given that many of the participants were known to the researcher, a conscious effort was made to avoid a phenomenon known as the interviewer effect, which can temper the validity and reliability of the data collected. This occurs when interviewers unintentionally influence respondents' answers, particularly on sensitive topics or when both parties know each other well beforehand (Denscombe, 2021; Davis, Couper, Janz, Caldwell & Resnicow, 2010). Leading the respondent to consciously edit their answers before communicating them to the interviewer (Davis et al., 2010).

Some of the topics discussed, particularly fatherhood and identity, could be categorised as sensitive in nature. Therefore, it was important for the research that an environment was fostered where participants could be open and honest. To facilitate this, it was discussed in detail beforehand how all data is stored and anonymised. Throughout, at perceived delicate touchpoints, the anonymisation of the data was reiterated. To help participants relax, an opening question simply asking them to "tell me a little bit about your career, what it has looked like and how long you have been in a leadership position", helped ease participants into the process as they spoke with pride of their achievements and with humour as they recounted anecdotal stories of life and career.

Encouraging participants to be open, honest, and engaged in discussing the topic requires a sensitive approach. Semi structured interviews facilitate the creation of a social bond between the researcher and participant, which helped address this challenge (Saunders et al., 2019; Qutoshi, 2018).

These interviews consisted of fourteen open ended questions, developed around five recurring themes identified in the literature review, which shaped and formed the research question and sub-objectives. These themes were: (i) Career & Leadership; (ii) Fatherhood & Work; (iii) Gendered Divergence and workplace penalties; (iv) Family Size & (v) Identity.

A pilot interview was conducted with a colleague before embarking on the interviews proper. This allowed the researcher to understand the expected approximate duration of the interviews, which was an important consideration to be clear and transparent about when scheduling time with such busy individuals.

Additionally, it helped shape the interview questions to align more directly with the research question, with some questions being broken into parts and others ultimately removed, the interview grew from an initial nine questions to the final draft of fourteen questions.

#### 4.5 SAMPLE SELECTION

Probability sampling is more commonly used in quantitative analysis and allows you to draw conclusions of the population, not just the sample itself.

Non-probability sampling is an approach where participant selection is not statistically random. Therefore, as per Dudovskiy (2022) the selection of individual participants is based on the discretion and judgement of the researcher and is commonly used in qualitative research where the richness and depth of the data are more important than the generalisability of the findings.

The non-probability sampling method chosen for this research is purposive sampling. Also, known as judgement or subjective sampling as the researcher selects participants using their own judgement, based on the research aim. Purposive sampling is appropriate

for studies that aim to understand the perceptions and views of participants, particularly in the case of rare or hard to access populations that have unique knowledge or experience (Dudovskiy, 2022).

Therefore, purposive sampling was deemed suitable to accurately support research objective 1.1, 1.2 (a) and 1.2 (b). For example, in research objective 1.2 (b) 'Workplace opportunity and earning potential', it is stated that this research aims to give voice to the participants with the aim of understanding their lived experience.

Consequently, the selection of participants adhered to the following criteria as displayed in Table 4.5.1 below:

<b>PARTICIPANT SELECTION CRITERIA</b>
<b>Must be a current or past Director or Managing Director</b>
<b>Must have operated in the Irish labour market</b>
<b>Must have four or more children</b>

***Table 4.5.1 Participant Selection Criteria***

Within the literature review we see that Connell et al. (2023) found that semi-structured interviews were used to 'explore issues in respondents' lives' and therefore a smaller pool of respondents were typically chosen in a "familiar trade-off for depth and complexity of information".

Additionally, we see that Kelland et al. (2021) and Tanquerel & Grau Grau (2020) used purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews to good effect within their respective research.

However, it is important to note that a natural limitation of purposive sampling is that it can be prone to bias and judgement error and is unlikely to produce generalisable results (Dudovskiy, 2022).

Based on the participant criteria in Table 4.5.1, the researcher identified ten potential participants that matched the criteria and that the researcher had access to within their business network across a variety of industries.

Following initial discussion outlining the content of the research and interviews, not all were willing to participate. Ultimately, the study concluded with a final group of seven participants who were well equipped to ensure the successful completion of the research goals.

As it transpired, this may have benefited the research as the additional time consideration to account for interviewing, transcribing, and analysing ten separate discussions may have impacted the quality and thoroughness of the analysis.

A table of interviewees has been included to give them shape whilst still respecting their anonymity:

Unique Identifier	Position	Industry	Company Size
IMD-1	Director	Manufacturing	70 Employees
IMD-2	Managing Director	Telecommunications	45 Employees
IMD-3	Director	Construction	60 Employees
IMD-4	Managing Director	Construction	60 Employees
IMD-5	Director	Distribution	90 Employees
IMD-6	Managing Director	Manufacturing	70 Employees
IMD-7	Co-Founder & Director	Private Education	25 Employees

**Table 4.5.2 - Participants**

#### 4.6 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Upon completion of the pilot interview, and with questions and participants settled, scheduling of the interviews began, with each participant allocated a unique identifier as per table (4.5.2). Consent was obtained via an audio time stamp at the start of each recording and via a signed consent form (Appendix 2).

The researcher's preference was to conduct in person interviews as it was important to establish trust, so the participants felt relaxed and free to discuss the topics in a free flowing and natural way, effectively and enjoyably, so the core questions could be asked and answered to see where they lead, which is sometimes in unexpected directions (Gerson, 2020). In person interviews foster a more natural conversational flow than online video calls which can lead to a more participatory, turn taking approach with

respect to speaking. Additionally, in person conversations also allow the interviewer to pick up on body language or subtle queues that can be lost on a video call (Gerson, 2020). IMD-1 to IMD-6 were able to facilitate in person interviews.

According to Dudovskiy (2022), it is crucial to create a calm and non-intimidating setting during interviews, whereas Gerson (2020) states that “the ideal interview location offer privacy, comfort and the chance to talk for as long as possible”. To achieve this, the researcher travelled to conduct the interviews in an environment that was familiar to the participants and conducive to facilitating the research aims.

IMD-1,4,5 and 6 were interviewed in their own private office.

IMD-2 and 3, were interviewed in their homes.

Each interview had a duration of between 30-50 minutes.

The first of seven interviews were recorded on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, at 8:21am. This interview was recorded using the ‘Recorder’ application on a Google Pixel 8 mobile handset.

Upon review of interview one with ‘IMD-1’, it became clear that while audio quality of the recording was superb, the automatic transcription service built into the Google Pixel 8 device was not appropriate. Upon further investigation it was discovered that while effective at points, the transcription service within this device was designed to transcribe short voice notes and memos only.

Transcription software’s were researched, and the decision was made to trial four different providers: Otter.ai, Cockatoo, Transkriptor and Turbo Scribe.

Cockatoo transformed the audio files to text expertly, managing the challenge of the different colloquial accents best, and provided an interface whereby one could easily tag each speaker to blocks of text that had been separated based on the conversation patterns and different speakers. Whereas there was still some removal of duplicates, correction of incomplete responses and correction of misheard words or phrases, these were minimal.



Therefore, Cockatoo was selected as the transcription software for this research project as it facilitated a swift transition to the thematic analysis necessary to understand and analyse this data set.

IMD-1 through IMD-6 were all recorded and transcribed using the same method.

Despite the best efforts of both parties, IMD-7 was unable to facilitate an in-person interview, so the software 'Microsoft Teams' was utilised to capture this interview via recorded video call. Again, although this software had an in-built transcription software the file was transferred into Cockatoo for more accurate transcription that was consistent with the formatting of the other six interviews.

Once collection was complete, data underwent thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for spotting patterns in your data and arranging it into themes. A theme is defined as a consistent recurrence of meaningful patterns within your data, which are systematic rather than random and arbitrary (Gerson, 2020).

Thematic analysis is useful for identifying common themes across a series of interviews and it is regarded as an effective method for exploring individuals' experiences and thoughts that are not easily observable (Gerson, 2020).

The research aim seeks to explore whether the fatherhood penalty exists in the Irish labour market. Specifically, the research examines if and how a fatherhood penalty is experienced by C-Suite fathers of four or more children. This research is building on quantitative research by the likes of Bygren et al. (2019), by adopting a qualitative approach and through the application of thematic analysis to the lived experiences of fathers.

Braun and Clarke (2019) discuss that reflexive thematic analysis is an accessible and theoretically adaptable interpretative method for qualitative data analysis, which helps in identifying and examining patterns and themes within a dataset. It is the six-phase theoretical framework for thematic analysis laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006) that was followed for this study.

The six phases are: 1. Familiarisation with the data; 2. Coding; 3. Searching for themes; 4. Reviewing themes; 5. Defining and naming themes; and 6. Writing up.

For this research, familiarisation with the data came from repeatedly listening to the recorded interviews prior to transcription. The researcher drives frequently in a professional capacity and the nuances and themes picked up while listening back were profound and invaluable for the coding and thematic analysis phases.

Gerson (2020) describes how this initial immersion in the data is a critical step toward organising the data conceptually.

The coding process involved systematically working through all the transcribed data, understanding the importance of giving equal time and attention to each part (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes were identified, reviewed, refined, and compiled into a final listing that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5: Analysis and Findings.

#### 4.7 RELIABILITY, VALIDITY AND LIMITATIONS

Saunders et al. (2019) explain that reliability pertains to how consistently data collection tools and methods yield the same results. Bryman and Bell (2015) emphasise the importance of research being replicable. That is, if the data collection methods are dependable, the analytical processes would yield consistent results if repeated by a different researcher or research team. It has also been noted that in qualitative research, reliability and validity are influenced by the researcher's judgement, unlike in quantitative research (Gerson, 2020; Barnham, 2015; Davis et al., 2010).

Ensuring the quality and validity of qualitative research is imperative. Saunders et al. (2019) discuss how the quality and robustness of the research findings will support the research design, therefore meaning that the insights and conclusions derived from them will withstand closer examination and avoid the research becoming imbued with the personal perspective or nostalgia of the researcher. Therefore, validity is associated with accuracy, ensuring the data is correctly interpreted and that the analysis, findings, and discussion accurately represent the reality and lived experiences of the fathers studied.

To protect the integrity of the research and ensure reliability and validity, several tactics were employed:

- Interview questions were trialled and changed until satisfied they were free from personal bias.
- The interview environments were strategically planned.
- Interviews were recorded to facilitate immersion in the data was possible.
- It was ensured that the research methods were congruent with the research question.
- The participants chosen were experienced, informed and knowledgeable about the area of study.
- All engagement with participants was open, transparent, and honest.
- A uniform and standardised method was applied to every aspect of data collection and analysis.

Adopting a qualitative research method, which relies on conducting and analysing semi-structured interviews, presents some limitations. As noted by Denscombe (2021), this approach can be time consuming and typically involves a smaller number of participants. Additionally, the population consisting solely of 'C-Suite' participants was not without its challenges. Collett (2023) discusses how when dealing with 'elites' for qualitative research, participants are typically much more difficult to source, approach and access, so researchers will face challenges pertaining to time constraints, power asymmetries, rapport building and, in some cases, will find their research design dictated by access to participants.

Having a limited scope to work with such as this, can make it difficult for researchers to draw broad conclusions about the topic at hand. However, one must aim to collect rich data, rather than focusing on a specific number of participants or the goal of saturation (Collett, 2023).

Moreover, the researcher's close association with the participants, all of whom were former employers, introduces a risk of bias, potentially affecting the data collection, analysis, and overall findings. As above, to address these issues the researcher remained mindful of these potential biases during the interview design and process.

#### 4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Collecting data for research requires addressing ethical considerations, particularly when human participants are involved, as highlighted by Saunders et al. (2019). To align with National College of Ireland's *'Ethical guidelines and procedures for research involving human participants'*, an *'Ethical Review Application Form'* was submitted on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024.

Participants received detailed information pertaining to the research's purpose, background, objectives, and the fact data collection would take place in the form of recorded semi-structured interviews, before being asked for their informed consent. Consistent with recommendations from Gerson (2020), potential participants were given every opportunity to decline participation to avoid any sense of obligation. Of the ten desired participants identified, three declined. Two due to availability, and one as they were simply not comfortable discussing the topics involved.

All were informed that their responses would remain anonymous, and this was repeated many times throughout the process, including how all data, including transcripts and recordings would be securely stored by the researcher. Each participant was allocated a unique identifier to ensure anonymity, as can be seen in Table (3.5.2), and they retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The collected primary data, comprising of six audio recordings and one video recording have been stored on an encrypted hard drive, accessible only by the researcher. The online transcription service Cockatoo has also been password protected and is accessible only the researcher. Data must be held for a period of five years and will be erased once this period has elapsed.

#### 4.9 CONCLUSION

This methodology chapter has outlined the research methodology adopted to effectively answer the research question. A piece of qualitative research with an interpretivist philosophy and an approach and design that is inductive, cross sectional and phenomenological.

The research method identified is that of semi-structured interviews with participants selected through purposive sampling. Data has been collected by recording, transcribed,

and analysed using thematic analysis. Tactics have been employed to ensure the research is reliable, valid, and ethical, while the limitations have also been acknowledged.

At every sub-section of the methodology chapter, the researcher has attempted to outline to the reader what decision was made, and critically, why that decision was made. Aligning all decisions to the research question at the heart of this paper.

Chapter five will detail the analysis and findings derived from the seven interviews & qualitative research.

## CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the process of extracting insights and identifying themes from the research interviews and describes the methods for analysing these themes. It organises the participants findings by theme, comparing and contrasting them within the context of the research question and objectives.

This research aims seek to explore whether the fatherhood penalty exists in the Irish labour market, from the perspective of C-Suite fathers of four or more children.

Congruent with the research methodology as outlined in chapter four, this research will be using the thematic analysis framework as laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006) for data analysis and coding.

The following research objectives support the research aim:

**1.1 To understand the self-perception of C-Suite executives with four or more children, about the fatherhood penalty in the Irish labour market.**

**1.2 Explore the view amongst these fathers regarding the impact of fatherhood on their professional lives in relation to:**

**(a) Professional identity.**

**(b) Workplace opportunity and earning potential.**

The researcher acknowledges that some of the research objectives and themes are closely related, so in some instances participant responses could be perceived as pertinent to more than one theme.

At the outset the process of data analysis was undertaken in line with the Braun and Clarke (2006) protocol. As part of this process, iterative rounds of coding and categorisation of the data took place. Table 5.1.1 illustrates some of the open codes, aggregate themes and research questions addressed.

FIRST ORDER THEMES			AGGREGATE LENSES	RESEARCH QUESTIONS ADDRESSED
LEADERSHIP	CONNECTION	OPPORTUNITY	HOME ENVIRONMENT AND LEADERSHIP STYLES	RESEARCH QUESTION 1.2 (A)
CAREER CHANGE	WORK FAMILY BALANCE	PEOPLE CENTRIC		
TENURE	BEING THERE	ALTRUISTIC TENDENCIES		
STAFF NUMBERS	SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT	DIFFICULT LIFE		
EMPLOYEE LOYALTY	RECIPROCAL	SINGLE FATHER		
CULTURE	FATHERS EXPECTATIONS	CAREGIVER	PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, BEHAVIOUR AND FATHERHOOD	RESEARCH QUESTION 1.2 (A) & 1.2 (B)
EMPLOYEES MARKET	SHIFTING DYNAMICS	BALANCE - FATHER V BOSS		
LESS LOYALTY	FRUSTRATION	NO TIME FOR RELATIONSHIPS		
STIGMA	MEN V WOMEN	PRICE OF SUCCESS		
IDEAL WORKER	PREMIUMS AND PENALTIES	LEAVE WORK FOR KIDS		
SENSE OF DUTY	PARENTAL LEAVE	FATHERHOOD AND LEADERSHIP	WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITY, EARNING POTENTIAL AND FAMILY SIZE	RESEARCH QUESTION 1.1 & 1.2 (B)
OWING	MULTINATIONAL V SME	CARE FOR EMPLOYEES		
STANDARD OF LIVING	GOVERNMENT FUNDING	BUSINESS FIRST		
CHANGING EXPECTATIONS	REAL V IDEAL	SUFFERING		
BECOMING A FATHER	THE RIGHT WAY	LEADERSHIP AND FAMILY		
BACK TO WORK NEXT DAY	STABILITY	TEAM BUILDING	MOTHERHOOD PENALTIES AND FATHERHOOD PENALTIES	RESEARCH QUESTION 1.1
EXPECTATIONS	CARE	FAMILY ORIENTED		
WORK UNINTERRUPTED	BREADWINNER REINFORCEMENT	COACHING		
BREADWINNER REVEALED	SINGLE MAN BIAS	CONNECTING		
WORK ABOVE HOME	FATHERS MORE DRIVEN	VALUES GRANDCHILDREN		
EARNING POTENTIAL	SELF PERCEPTION	BARRIER	BALANCING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES	RESEARCH QUESTION 1.1 & 1.2 (A)
THE RIGHT THING	MOTHERHOOD BIAS	FULL EMPLOYMENT		
PERCEIVED RIGHT WAY	BIAS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	BETTER WORK LIFE BALANCE		
LEAD BY EXAMPLE	COMPLETELY BREADWINNER	EARLY CAREER		
IDENTITIES SEPARATE	NO CHOICE	WORK ETHIC		
TECHNOLOGY	SUCCEED	LATE CAREER	MOTHERHOOD PENALTIES AND FATHERHOOD PENALTIES	RESEARCH QUESTION 1.1
SEPARATION DISSIPATES	LIFE CHOICE	SUCCESS		
WORK PERMEATES HOME LIFE	KIDS FIRST BUSINESS SECOND	FATHERHOOD		
PRESENTEEISM	BUSINESS FIRST CAN BE KIDS FIRST	ENTREPRENEUR		
LENIENCY FOR WORKERS	COMPANY FACILITATED FAMILY	HOUSEWIFE		
NOT PRESENT	IDENTITY	SELF DOUBT	BALANCING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES	RESEARCH QUESTION 1.1 & 1.2 (A)
LONG HOURS	WORK AFFECTS FAMILY	CHANGING PERSPECTIVES		
ABSENT	TAKES OVER FAMILY	INCREASED FOCUS		
WORK ALWAYS THERE	LOYALTY NOT RECIPROCAL	SECURITY		
24 HOURS A DAY	MOTHERHOOD PENALTIES CONFIRMED	NON FATHERS - 'FLIGHTY'		
GRATITUDE TO SPOUSE	FATHERHOOD PENALTIES DISMISSED	FEMALE CAREGIVER	BALANCING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES	RESEARCH QUESTION 1.1 & 1.2 (A)
BRINGING BUSINESS HOME	FATHERHOOD PREMIUMS CONFIRMED	MALE CAREGIVER		
SEIZE OPPORTUNITY	NON-FATHERS PENALISED	PRIDE		
PIVOTING	MARRIED MEN PREFERRED	SHARED VALUES		
THE NEXT THING	EMPLOYER EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP	CONTINUATION OF BREADWINNER MENTALITY		
WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITY	MULTIPLICITY	WORK TOOK PRECEDENT		

**Table 5.1.1 - Coding Structure**

## 5.2 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

### THEME 1: HOME ENVIRONMENT - LEADERSHIP STYLES

The participants discussed their experiences of career and leadership at a high level. When discussing career and leadership, participants revealed attitudes and beliefs toward the world and the world of work. IMD-2 displayed altruistic tendencies, placing the enrichment of others' lives before commercial gain.

*"People are what it is all about. I never focused on what the money was going to be, what the revenue was going to be. For the business, maybe so, but not for me personally. It was about having a great team. How can I improve people's lives?" (IMD-2)*

Interestingly, these views were formed by the personal experiences of the participant and important in the context of research question 1.2 (a).

IMD-2 was single father for many years, and attitudes toward workplace culture were forged by their personal experiences as a main caregiver.

*"I had a very difficult life in the early part of this. I was only 19 when I was a father first. My daughter, who I reared actually was a big part of this and that, I had to balance being a single parent. And I was always conscious that I wanted to give other people opportunities and other people a better life than I was able to give myself at that time" (IMD-2)*

Others felt that rather than the culture of reciprocal trust and care as demonstrated by IMD-2, that leaders who lead by example and demonstrate good practice and work ethic were likely to gain the trust and respect of employees. Within this feedback, they demonstrate a loyalty to the workplace above the family, and nod to a culture of hegemonic masculinity and ideal worker norms.

*"The thing about it was the day my wife had our first child I brought her to the hospital, the child was born, and I went back to work the next day. That wasn't what people asked me to do, but it was the expectation of what should be done. There was a lot of people relying on me to give them direction and to support them. So, I felt my place was to do that" (IMD-1)*

This perception of a need to demonstrate leadership through presenteeism has endured. Encouraging a first in, last out, culture of masculinity in the workplace despite subtle acknowledgement that this may not be necessary.

*"The funny thing about it, even the environment I'm working in now, I would still have very much the same feelings. I could probably come in later in the morning, I wouldn't have to stay late in the evenings, being in the position I'm in. But I feel that we have 30 or 40 guys working in a factory. They see my car first thing every morning when they come in. And I suppose it's more of a sense of leadership than management. Anybody can manage, but it's really important you lead the company, and you lead the ethics and work environment within the company. You can only do that by being present" (IMD-1)*



This commitment to work, to long hard hours and graft was also discussed as a factor determining leadership and business success by another participant.

*“I was working during the day, and working night as well, 15, 16, 17 hours a day, six days a week. That’s it of course. It had to be done” (IMD-3)*

However, the stark contrast in how these senior leaders perceived leadership continued. A single father and main caregiver, in contrast to a leader with a more ‘traditional’ family dynamic, demonstrating opposing views of the working world. This provides insight into the complexity of professional identity for fathers, and just how differently men who are perceived externally as being similar, can experience professional life and fatherhood.

*“So, I think parenthood and leadership is a tricky balance, but not an impossible balance. Because leadership is not about being there all day long, every day. It’s about doing the right thing, setting something up from the heart that will work. And if I focused on my staff, which I did, and I really looked after them in work, they made sure I was able to do what I had to do from a family perspective. And that worked” (IMD-1)*

## THEME 2: PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, BEHAVIOUR AND FATHERHOOD

Participants provide insights into how they, as senior leaders in business, experience their professional identity in relation to their roles as fathers, congruent to research objective 1.2 (a). Two main themes emerged in the analysis: the intersection of professional identity and fatherhood, and the influence of fatherhood of professional behaviour and values.

Many of the participants identified themselves as the primary financial provider for their family, or breadwinner as it is typically known, and this role significantly shapes their professional identity.

*“I absolutely saw myself as the breadwinner. Yes, no question about it. Only because it was our life choice though. It wasn’t that I... So just to be clear, if she had wanted to work, that was fine. It wasn’t me saying, you can’t work” (IMD-5)*

Although it was revealed that within the breadwinner identity there were layers and differences to how a breadwinner viewed spouses. All viewed their partners as important but positioned them differently within their breadwinner identity based on their view of the world.

*“I’m a firm believer, I think the mother is at home. She didn’t work and just raised the family” (IMD-3)*

This shows a strong identification with the traditional breadwinner role, where being the main provider is a core aspect of the perception of professional self.

Moreover, participants expressed how they experienced a pressure and responsibility to provide for their families, and that these are significant motivators for professional success, impacting opportunity and earning potential as per research objective 1.2 (b).

*“You feel the pressure of your responsibility for those people to provide. That’s what gets me up in the morning, get me out of bed. Is that you have to do it, and I want to do it. I actually enjoy it, I thrive off it, I live off it and that’s where my success has probably come from” (IMD-7)*

*“You were trying to get a better standard of living for your wife and your family, so it was important your worked hard” (IMD-6)*

There was an undercurrent that participants had no choice but to succeed professionally, because they had adopted into fatherhood. A north star to pursue, and an awareness of a sense of duty to others than themselves.

*So, now, how would it have an effect? I think I knew I had to succeed. But I also knew that succeeding had its price as well" (IMD-3)*

This indicates that their drive and work ethic are deeply intertwined with their roles as providers for their families, but not without expressing awareness of the opportunity cost of the breadwinner identity.

*"I never wanted to be the most successful businessperson in the world at the cost of my family" (IMD-2)*

Participants also expressed how one could be a breadwinner for one's own family, whilst at the same time developing a warmth, empathy and care through fatherhood that benefited younger workers in the organisation.

*"I would still say that I am hardworking and the breadwinner of the family, however I do think that fatherhood has made me more, in some respects, warmer to younger workers, that I'd look out for them more and I'd have a more caring side of me" (IMD-4)*

This supports the suggestion in 'Theme 1' that fatherhood can in some instances, influence the management style of participants, making them more compassionate and supportive leaders. Congruent to this, participants expressed a desire to be known not just as successful professional but also as good fathers and family men.

*"I'd like to think of myself as family oriented. Somebody to look up to, somebody who'd be strong. But I suppose I would have known somebody before who would have said they didn't want to be remembered as a good worker; they want to be known as a good father"(IMD-4)*

Participants felt they must make a conscious effort to balance professional responsibilities with family needs. Interestingly, sometimes this manifested itself as viewing working hard, maximising earning potential, as a way to secure their family's future and therefore, good parenting.

*I was a father first and business second. Always. Always. And there's times when you have to make a conscious choice to be fair so can be first, be putting the kids first. But, putting the kids first can be at times, be when you have to go and work hard for a period" (IMD-2)*

The themes of professional identity and fatherhood are deeply interconnected for these senior leaders. Their roles as fathers influence their work ethic, management style, and professional values, while their professional identity is often framed around being effective breadwinners.

### THEME 3: WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITY, EARNING POTENTIAL AND FAMILY SIZE

Evidence of various reflections on workplace opportunity and earning potential were discovered throughout the analysis. Particularly, in the context of fatherhood and professional responsibility.

Several participants mentioned that prioritising family sometimes affected their career choices. One participant noted a reluctance to work far from home, which potentially limited his chances for progression to more senior positions at that juncture.

*"I wouldn't have worked further away. So, for more senior positions, I don't think I would have been more favourable" (IMD-4)*

There is also a recognition that the higher titles and responsibilities that go hand in hand with higher earning potential, such as that of 'Director', can increase commitment to professional life, but this can sometimes come with the expectation of sacrificing family life and fatherhood.

*"Roles and titles are not just about giving people responsibility; it's about getting people to commit to the company. So, you go home and tell your wife, 'Oh, they made me a director' but what does that actually mean? It's like putting a wedding band on your finger, you're now married to the company. All of a sudden, you're expected to be away from the family. The emotional and personal affect that has on that person is massive. Commitment, but it's not always reciprocal commitment" (IMD-1)*

Whereas others felt very fortunate to have been in an environment where they felt supported and opportunity and earning potential were unaffected. An important distinction here is that this participant founded the company with siblings and only ever worked for themselves, whereas other participants typically worked for others, before founding their companies. These factors external to work, shape identities professionally.

*"I think I was lucky to be in an environment where families were cherished, with my brothers as well. I think the fact that if you treat your employees in a way that you'd like to treat your family, that they will give you the space and support that's needed when it's needed outside. So, they knew how important my family was to be me, but they also knew that I was there for them" (IMD-2)*

It was put to participants whether they felt there was a relationship between family size and workplace opportunity and earning potential for fathers. Participants did not feel family size had inhibited them in their careers, nor did they feel it would factor into

recruitment decisions when hiring. On the contrary, a fatherhood premium was revealed in their answers, with fathers of larger families being seen as 'stable', hardworking' and 'trustworthy', and therefore more likely to avail of workplace opportunities and increased earning potential.

*"I would go for the family man, yeah, definitely. He's settled in his ways, he's married, he's had a few kids. He has a mortgage. So, if he wanted to stay with me, you know, he'd work hard. I'd be able to pay him well, I'd be able to look after him" (IMD-3)*

IMD-7 displayed similar feelings on this topic. Pointing not to the stability of home life as a benefit, but rather the additional drive that comes from the pressures of being a father and provider.

*"You will lean towards the guy who has kids than the guy who hasn't. Because you can, I suppose he's the one that is probably under serious pressure to get the job. You'll know when you're talking to them who wants it more, who needs it more" (IMD-7)*

Whereas another participant agrees with this sentiment, a bias toward non-fathers is revealed. This was an interesting development, as it was a bias shared by many of the participants.

*"I'll give you a laugh, I'd actually go for the guy who does have kids. That is a bias, actually, but it's a bias towards the fact that he has these kids, I'd see him as a family man, a caring person, a people person. That's food for the soul and I think he will have a bigger drive to make sure he's successful at the same time. The single guy, what's he doing? Why isn't he married? Why doesn't he have kids? What's he doing? Is he a lad about town? It's a complete bias because it's utter nonsense. I know that" (IMD-2)*

Again, this participant also felt that not having children would undermine a potential employee's chance at availing of a workplace opportunity. Revealing a lack of trust towards non-fathers and a belief they are less likely to endure in their roles.

*"Then Joe soaps single, he might just go off and go off to Australia or the States or something like that. Might move somewhere differently completely, or would change his career"*

Finally, for larger families, it was shown that the support of spouses is crucial, with many participants highlighting how their partners understanding, and cooperation have been essential in managing career.

*"I couldn't do what I do without the support of my wife. She's been incredible in managing the home front and allowing me to focus on work" (IMD-3)*

#### THEME 4: MOTHERHOOD PENALTIES - FATHERHOOD PENALTIES

The semi structured interviews provided a detailed exploration of gender penalties and premiums within workplace dynamics, fatherhood, and societal expectations, therfroee addressing research objective 1.1.

The perceptions of the participants on these topics reveal themes that highlight the disparities and evolving perceptions related to gender in professional settings. First, motherhood penalties are overwhelmingly confirmed by participants.

One participant notes the overt penalties women faced historically, such as having to leave the workplace upon marriage.

*"Well, I suppose the penalty for women or for ladies as you know going back again in the 70's, 80's, when the ladies worked in the civil service, when she got married never mind got*

*pregnant, when she got married, she had to leave work and that was it. There was no choice. And that was a very kind of severe penalty for women” (IMD-3)*

The penalties extended to pregnancy and motherhood, where women faced significant career interruptions and biases.

*If you said to me, it was a woman with five kids, I don’t think I’d have a total aversion to it, but there might be a little bit of bias and hesitancy” (IMD-5)*

In one scenario, even the potential of becoming a mother was enough to constitute being penalised, with the suggestion being that women are viewed as less committed or reliable employees due to potential family responsibilities.

*“I definitely have observed penalties against women in the workplace and especially if a woman of a certain age comes in and people look at their fingers and see a ring and they say the next thing they’re going to have is a child and there’ll be a work gap” (IMD-1)*

This illustrates how societal norms disadvantaged women, forcing them out of the workforce at crucial points in their lives. In contrast to the motherhood penalty, the concept of a fatherhood penalty is largely dismissed by most participants. One participant explicitly states that they have never experienced penalties or ‘prejudice’ as they call it and point to the relative leniency shown towards fathers due to the tight labour market. Intimating that parental leave is tolerated rather than encouraged.

*“Fatherhood. I’ve never experienced a fatherhood... probably prejudice for lack of a better word. I think employers have to accept a lot of things that probably they wouldn’t have accepted in the past” (IMD-6)*



It is suggested that fathers, even when balancing work and family are not subjected to the same level of scrutiny or disadvantage as mothers. However, one participant who is an executive coach for directors of large corporates, believes that there is tension between professional women and men. A theme is revealed whereby there is frustration from men at a new type of perceived 'Female Premiums', caused by gender rebalancing at corporate level.

*"Penalty? To be honest with you no. I think we had scenarios in my work experience, and I see scenarios now in my coaching. What I am seeing now is this, I think there's an undercurrent of fathers beginning to expect more. Men see women being promoted purely because they're women. And I have a couple of cases of that at the moment where it's causing extreme frustration for these men, so they feel, what's good for the goose is good for the gander and now my wife has had a baby so I want a lot of paternity leave and even though the world is saying fatherhood and all the rest and all they should have, that's not the real world, I think. There's an element of what's real and ideal here" (IMD-2)*

While many participants either had not experienced or did not understand the concept of fatherhood penalties in the workplace as presented to them, it was interesting that a different genre of fatherhood penalties that senior leaders experience was revealed through participant responses. The price of success.

*"If you're a leader you can choose to be a leader without your family. And I see it, I'm an executive coach now, and I see it all the time where people just put the business first all the time. They are the ones in my opinion who are suffering the most in their lives. They're suffering eternally because they realise, they've missed out on something" (IMD-2)*

This idea that executive fathers pay their penalties at home rather than in the workplace is a view also expressed by others. A feeling of regret is expressed. That perhaps loyalty to the organisation should not have taken precedent over family.

*"The reality was that you work the family around work rather than work around the family. So, work for whatever reason, whether right or wrong, was the priority. I think I would change a good bit. I don't know if I would have ran up the corporate ladder as quickly. It probably wouldn't have had such a big impact on my family, my family unit." (IMD-1)*

Also, the insidious nature of work creeping into home for senior leaders and directors was shared by participants. It appears to be an accepted norm for many participants, that work permeates home life, that it is always present, and that this is a price to be paid as father if you wish to succeed professionally.

*"I wasn't home that much, you know. When you're working and then running a business and it's, the business, it is always watching you know. It doesn't, it never leaves you" (IMD-3)*

Finally, there was a word of warning and a piece of advice for the young leaders of today. To be aware that you may not experience a fatherhood penalty in the workplace, that is on a par with the motherhood penalty, but that you will experience a large, different kind of penalty if you put work before all else as a father.

*"So, if a young leader said to me what should I do? I'd say be the best leader you can be but not at the expense of your kids and family. You can't, because not only will the journey not be as rewarding but the end goal, the end destination won't be as rewarding because you can't undo the times that you didn't go to that football game. It can't be undone. So, the time and effort as a leader to develop your own people around you and your family pays back multitudes in the future"*

## THEME 5: THE BALANCING OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Participants often discussed the challenges of balancing their roles as leaders and fathers and revealed their personal experiences and perceptions of managing their dual identities. These discussions help address both research objectives 1.1 and 1.2 (a).

One participant discussed their efforts toward keeping their work and home life separate, emphasising the importance of dedicating time to family, and creating boundaries to prevent work from intruding on personal time.

*“You try to keep them separate. You try to keep your weekends pretty much free and spend as much time with the kids and the family as possible. But the strain and pressures of work are on so it’s very hard to get your mind away from work” (IMD-1)*

This sentiment is reinforced by other participants who again point to the importance of separating work and family when trying to maintain balance.

*“Personally, I always think you’re better off going to work, doing whatever hours you do at work and when you go home then you have separation. So, when you pull into your house work’s not there any longer” (IMD-6)*

Interestingly, one participant focused on how technological advancement has blurred the boundaries between work and home life. Pointing toward technology as the beginning of the insidious creep of professional life into our personal spaces.

*“Once the mobile phone came you had people ringing you constantly, especially in the building trade. Early morning, late evenings, weekends. And that severely affected your ability to turn off from being in work to being outside of work. So, the fact that communication tools became so flexible and so available, that actually took the work environment outside of work, which is probably not a good thing” (IMD-1)*

This participant expands on this point and applies it to general community, pointing toward the negative impacts this has on family, detracting from what should be quality time between fathers and children.

*“And if you’re looking at how you can give the right time to your children and your family, if you’re continuously out and about and checking your phone, you’re distracted. You’re not present. So, a lot of people think they’re working at home, and they think they’re giving time to their family. But they’re not” (IMD-1)*

Participants acknowledged the difficulty of managing their roles as leaders and fathers, noting that these roles often overlapped and influenced each other. Balancing multiple identities involves the challenge of being fully present in both domains, while fulfilling the responsibility that both roles demand, which are immense. Participants highlighted how the constant demands of being a senior leader often intruded into family life, making it difficult to keep a clear distinction between the two.

*“So, you’re on the mobile phone so that, and you know, and your there and something goes wrong at work and your irritable with the kids and you know, it’s hard enough going doing something like that” (IMD-5)*

Others spoke about the importance and necessity of adaptability, using a beautiful analogy relating to the changing colours of a chameleon to contextualise the shifting identities of fathers and the difficulty of managing the multiplicity of identities.

*“If you want to be a leader you’ve got to be a chameleon. Absolutely, yeah. And it’s the same when you come home, you have to change that colour, change to reflect. It’s hard, but you have to be constantly changing to suit other people’s needs” (IMD-7)*

This participant further expanded this point, pointing toward the exhaustion experienced at times from managing this load, and their belief that this is a skill that not everyone has. Exhaustion from work in itself and how this impacts one’s mood with and behaviour towards children is a penalty experienced by busy professionals that is relatable to many.

*“It can get tiring trying to keep changing, keep changing, but it’s a gift, it’s a strength. Lots of people cannot do it. Obviously, you’ve got a family life too and it all blends in sometimes and it’s about managing those. But it’s to try and not turn red, that’s the problem” (IMD-7)*

And finally, the distinction between work and home identities has become increasingly blurred over time for some participants, reflecting changes in their careers and personal lives.

*“I think initially they would have been two separate identities but over time, fifteen years is a long time, I don’t know when I can pinpoint it but they definitely did become blurred. I think so” (IMD-4)*

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION CHAPTER

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This section revisits the research section and objectives, integrating the findings in Chapter 5: Analysis and Findings with the existing literature in Chapter 3: Literature review. It discusses the practical applications and limitations of the study, as well as providing recommendations for further research in the future. The study explores whether the fatherhood penalty exists in the Irish labour market through the self-perception and experiences of C-Suite executives, with four or more children.

### 6.2 INTERPRETATION AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 6.2.1 HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND WORK CULTURE

The findings provide evidence to support the view in extant literature that hegemonic masculinity exists within the working culture of the Irish labour market. Some participants adhered to traditional norms of masculinity, demonstrating a culture of presenteeism and long working hours. This 'first in, last out' mentality reinforces the ideal worker norms seen in the literature. It is possible that these norms could marginalise parents who are unable to commit to such norms due to their family responsibilities as shown by Burnett et al. (2013) and reveals potential fatherhood penalties as per research question 1.1, although many participants did not view them as such, but rather, the standard expectations of them as males in the professional sphere. This perpetuates gender biases and aligns to the literature on hegemonic masculinity and its impact on working culture (Connell et al., 2023; Gatrell et al., 2022).

#### 6.2.2 MOTHERHOOD PENALTIES

Participants overwhelmingly confirmed the existence of workplace penalties for women in professional settings. As seen in the extant literature, these penalties manifest as biases and career interruptions. This is supported by Icardi et al. (2021) and Torzewska and Lovasz (2020) who highlight the significant career interruptions and societal expectations that penalise women for motherhood.

The interviews also revealed stark differences in how participants perceived fatherhood and motherhood professionally. Deep rooted biases emerged, with some participants (IMD-2) explicitly acknowledging as such. With mothers experiencing the penalties noted

above, fathers often experienced premiums, discussed in sub-section 6.2.3. These stark differences highlight the need for more government intervention in this area, again noted by participants, and further development of egalitarian policies that do not penalise one gender over the other. This discourse from the interview analysis again supports the work of Icardi et al. (2021) and Torzewska and Lovasz (2020) in particular and reveals the complexity of professional identity for parents, irrespective of gender, thus helping to address research objective 1.2 (a).

#### 6.2.3 FATHERHOOD PREMIUMS

There was evidence to support the notion of fatherhood premiums as seen in the literature review as participants revealed biases towards fathers over non-fathers in hiring decisions. These biases stem from perceptions that fathers are more 'stable' and 'trustworthy', while non-fathers are perceived by participants as less committed and more likely to leave and pursue career opportunities or go travelling. These findings did not support research question 1.1 and the exploration of whether a fatherhood penalty exists but did align with and support work on fatherhood premiums from (Bari, 2023; Torzewska and Lovasz, 2020; Glauber, 2018; Bütikofer, Jensen & Salvanes, 2018).

This also aligns to work by Mari (2019) as it indicates as societal expectation that fathers are more committed to their roles due to their family responsibilities. Many of the participants repeatedly stated their belief that having children and a mortgage meant men would work harder, which is clear and tangible impact of fatherhood on professional identity, as per research objective 1.2 (a). Additionally, this impact on professional identity, and the intrinsic drive to succeed presents fatherhoods positive effect of opportunity and earning potential, contrasting with work by Bygren et al. (2017) and contributing to the completion of research objective 1.2 (b).

#### 6.2.4 FATHERHOOD PENALTIES

The research aim sought to explore whether the fatherhood penalty exists in the Irish labour market. Specifically, if and how this is experienced by C-suite fathers of four or more children as per research objective 1.1. Although limited, the literature review did reveal extant literature supporting the notion of a fatherhood penalty, notably work from Steffen et al. (2019); Bygren et al. (2017) & Berdahl and Moon (2013). However, many participants did not seem to understand the rationale of a fatherhood penalty or

seemingly had never given the concept any consideration until these interviews. Possibly due to this lack of comprehension, many of the participants segued back toward the more familiar topic of motherhood penalties when searching for an answer, thus supporting work on gender penalties and motherhood penalties in the literature review (Bari, 2023; Icardi et al., 2021; Torzewska and Lovasz, 2020; Glauber, 2018; Bütikofer, Jensen & Salvanes, 2018)

Despite this ambivalence toward the notion of fatherhood penalties, our findings subtly revealed nuanced instances where fatherhood had worked against the participants. For example, some participants felt that being too vocal about their parenting responsibilities could lead to perceptions of reduced commitment. This aligns with the concept of fatherhood penalties, where fathers who actively engage in caregiving might face subtle biases, similar to the more overt penalties experienced by mothers. This is supported by the literature discussing the penalties associated with deviating from traditional gender roles in professional settings (Tanqueral & Grau-Grau., 2020; Steffens et al., 2019) and contributes to objective 1.1 and the understanding of how fatherhood penalties are perceived in the Irish labour market by C-suite fathers of four or more children.

However, our findings also illustrated the perceptions of a single father, a primary caregiver. This participant's experience was far removed from any notion of fatherhood penalty stemming from caregiving responsibilities. Indeed, their intrinsic values and beliefs as a primary caregiver, shaped the very culture of their organisation. These contradictory findings display that a father's perception of how they will be perceived for adopting into involved fatherhood, are contingent on their own personal circumstances and support research objective 1.2 (a) pertaining to professional identity and changes to how one perceives themselves. An entrepreneur who built the company and culture from the ground up, can experience these scenarios entirely differently to a director in a larger corporate organisation, where a work culture that promotes hegemonic masculinity, reflecting the findings or traditional work culture norms (Connell et al., 2023).

Mari (2019) discussed selection theory, where men who are already successful in their careers, select into fatherhood., thus appearing to receive a fatherhood premium. This was the lived experience of participant IMD-1, who was already the Managing Director of



a company before starting his family. However, when the reality of balancing work with parenting unfolded, we see that even having selected into fatherhood, that fatherhood penalties can still be experienced. This father was expected to continue work uninterrupted despite becoming a father, as his was a culture that valued long hours and constant availability. Had this father, or any father in such a culture sought to focus on parenting responsibilities and involved fatherhood, fatherhood penalties would be incurred supporting the work of Steffen et al. (2019) and Berdahl and Moon (2013).

An unexpected outcome in our findings was the explicit positive bias towards fathers in hiring, where they were preferred as more reliable and more stable. However, it would appear that this would not offer them protection from fatherhood penalties once employed, especially if they sought to actively engage in caregiving. This dichotomy suggests that while societal norms may favour fathers superficially, deeper biases and penalties still exist for those who challenge traditional gender roles and supports the work of Kelland et al. (2022) who discuss the 'forfeits' that caregiving fathers are subjected to professionally.

#### 6.2.4 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Research objective 1.2 (a) focused on the change to self-perception experienced by C-suite executives when transitioning to fatherhood. For many participants fatherhood positively influenced their professional behaviour and values. It fostered a sense of responsibility and leadership that transcended into their workplace, enhancing their leadership styles and professional practices. This is consistent with the findings of Stellner (2022) who discussed the transformative effects on professional identities that fatherhood can have.

Indeed, one participant displayed a leadership style embedded with altruistic tendencies derived from their caregiver experiences as a single parent. From the experience of being a single parent, that developed an empathetic and supportive management style. Thus, they prioritised the well-being and enrichment of their team members, in the belief that not only was this the best way to succeed professionally, but also that this would afford them the trust and time to look after the responsibilities as a parent. This further aligns with Stellner (2022) who discusses transformational leadership and inter-role transfer

for fathers in leadership positions, stating that fathers who adopt multiple roles tend to develop competencies that enrich their leadership capabilities.

#### 6.2.5 MULTIPLICITY OF IDENTITIES

Modern men wear many hats and this multiplicity of identities, and the conflicts therein were discussed by many of the participants as they attempted to balance their roles as fathers and professionals. This theme encompassed and contributed to all research objectives, as it traverses the themes of penalties, identity and workplace opportunity and earning potential.

One participant highlighted how his identity as a single parent influenced his leadership style, prioritising empathy, and support. This aligns with Humberd et al. (2015) who discuss how fathers must work to integrate their professional and caregiving roles, creating a more holistic identity that encompasses both aspects of their lives. Hanlon (2018) also supports this, suggesting that contemporary fatherhood involves nurturing roles that reshape traditional masculinity, enabling fathers to bring a more inclusive and empathetic approach to their professional identities.

However, many participants also experienced role conflict and identity tension as they navigated the expectations of being an 'ideal worker' and a father. This created tension at the point where workplace norms and caregiving responsibilities, or perhaps just the expression of a desire for caregiving responsibilities meet. This finding echoes Humberd et al. (2015) who describe the challenges fathers face in integrating their roles due to entrenched gender norms. Hanlon (2018)) further explains that the evolving expectations of fatherhood can create contradictions and tensions as fathers strive to fulfil both traditional breadwinning roles and modern nurturing responsibilities.

As the findings are congruent with the work of Hanlon (2018) Humberd et al. (2015), they provide a deeper understanding of how fathers navigate their dual roles by highlighting the internal conflict that burned within our participants. By acknowledging the evolving nature of fatherhood and its impact on professional life, organisations could create more inclusive and supportive environments that foster and encourage the multiplicity of identities of employees.

### 6.3 LIMITATIONS

This study had a set timeframe and hard deadline, which along with the use of purposive sampling, resulted in the prevailing limitation of a limited sample size. While Gerson (2020) argues that qualitative studies aim to maximise information and even the contribution of a single participant can derive significant value, the small sample size remains a notable limitation. This study is limited to seven participants across five industries. More time could have allowed for a larger cohort of semi-structured interviews, allowing for a broader corpus of transcripts to be analysed and from that, a deeper understanding of the perspective of participants in comparison to their peers and the extant literature.

Every effort was made to ensure validity, however, as with all qualitative research the reliability of the qualitative data, as opposed to quantitative data, is influenced by the researcher's judgement as is therefore not assured Dudovskiy (2022).

Therefore, additional participants could help enhance and critique the insights gained from the study.

A further limitation of this study concerns the longer-term impact of shifting societal norms and legislation on the perceptions of fathers in the workplace meaning that, perhaps this topic would benefit from a longitudinal research approach which can provide deeper contextual understanding and enhanced research through temporality (Wond and Macaulay, 2011).

And finally, as explained by Collett (2023), qualitative research involving 'elites' leads researchers to encounter significant challenges in sourcing, approaching and assessing participants. These constraints can sometimes result in limitations pertaining to time constraints, power imbalances and rapport building.

### 6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is clear to the researcher that there is value to be derived from qualitative research on these topics. Therefore, as noted in the limitations section, research with a broader population may be able to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experience and perceptions of fathers on these important topics.

Again, as noted in the limitation section, perhaps a longitudinal research approach would provide further insight.

Another recommendation for further research that may prove beneficial would be an approach that focuses on a cohort of participants gathered from one specific industry. This would allow for nuanced understandings cognisant of labour market settings which may be more hegemonic, or male dominated than others.

Another interesting avenue for further research would be to consider this question in the context of entrepreneurs. Examining how leaders who run their own organisation as a cohort, in comparison to leaders who work for others, would provide an interesting dimension to the literature. The evidence from this study points to the need for such research given the stark viewpoints from both groups of leaders.

Finally, understanding the perceptions of employees toward leaders in their organisations, as the leaders transition into fatherhood, to see how the perceptions of different stakeholders, compare or contrast with the self-perception of C-Suite executives would be a worthwhile avenue to examine given that there is currently very little literature which addresses this question.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This research set out to investigate whether a fatherhood penalty exists in the Irish labour market. Specifically, this research examined if and how a fatherhood penalty was experienced by C-Suite fathers of four or more children.

Through in-depth qualitative analysis, in the form of semi-structured interviews, the study revealed several critical insights.

While this research supported the commonly held belief that fatherhood typically results in career premiums, this research also found that the individuals interviewed faced professional disadvantages and revealed deeply engrained biases associated with the intersection of fatherhood and work that could be perceived as penalties. These findings are significant as they challenge existing narratives and highlight the complexity of balancing professional and family responsibilities in a nation with deeply entrenched traditional gender norms that influence both domestic roles and professional expectations.

The analysis and findings from the interviews revealed several recurring themes, including the persistence of traditional gender norms, work cultures built around the ideal worker trope, and the complex inner conflicts between professional identity and responsibilities as a father. These themes presented fatherhood penalties that are not as overt as motherhood penalties, but that are multifaceted and manifest in subtle ways. Participants confirmed that while fatherhood can on occasion offer advantages such as perceived stability and improved work ethic, it could at the same time lead to increased scrutiny and expectations that could potentially have negative effects.

This study contributes to the broader literature by providing a nuanced understanding of how fatherhood is perceived to by C-Suite fathers of four or more children in the Irish labour market. It offers an opportunity for fathers to discuss their lived experiences as professionals and fathers, revealing a complex balancing of multiple identities. Participants experiences vary considerably. Some are shaped as professionals by their experiences as caregivers, others give precedence to work over family as all times, perceiving this approach as the right thing to do.

On the positive side, participants revealed that fatherhood had enriched their professional identities, enhancing their sense of responsibility and leadership skills. However, this research also revealed significant challenges, including role conflict and identity tension, as fathers navigated traditional work expectations and their caregiving roles. These challenges often manifested as fatherhood penalties, where fathers faced subtle biases and professional disadvantages. Interestingly, the demographic interviewed did not necessarily view penalties as penalties, but simply the expected consequences and expectations of success.

The research illuminated the nuanced nature of these dynamics and underscored the complexity of integrating professional and fatherhood identities. It is clear that knowledge in this area is inchoate. For this reason, the researcher recommends that research in this area continues. A broader study, involving an increased number of participants would be valuable, as would studies focused on a single sector, or a longitudinal study following the journeys of young fathers over a prolonged period.

These recommendations point to some of the limitations of this research, which are predominantly to do with the limited sample size, which affected the study by limiting the number of opposing and different views that the conversations revealed. Had it been possible to interview more candidates, then this would logically have revealed richer, deeper insight and presented an opportunity to hear contrasting and opposing views to those presented by our participants.

In summary, this study confirms the existence of fatherhood penalties, albeit in a more subtle and nuanced way than the more overt penalties experienced by mothers. By highlighting these nuanced challenges, the research calls for further research and greater understanding in this area, so as to illuminate the need for more inclusive policies and cultural shifts to support all parents, ensuring a fair and balanced professional environment. Only by recognising, understanding and supporting the dual identities of the professional caregiver, male and female, can we move toward an Ireland that enhances both individual and familial well-being alongside organisational success.

“See how happiness hides in the humdrum, how it abides in the everyday toing and froing as though happiness were a thing that should not be seen, as though it were a note that cannot be heard until it sounds from the past”.

**Paul Lynch**

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

POSITION	QUESTION
	1 Tell me a bit about your career, what it has looked like and how long you have been in a leadership position
	We are at full employment, with more jobs available than people to fill them. As a man, how different is the world of
	2 work here in Ireland now than it was then?
	3 Where along that journey did you discover you were going to become a father?
	4 Did it in any way make you reconsider or recalibrate your career aspirations?
	5 And reflecting, do you think your career trajectory has been different than anticipated because you became a father?
	6 As a father, do you feel you were treated any differently to your peers in relation to promotions and earning potential?
	7 As your family grew and the caregiving demands of parenthood increased due to family size, did you experience any differences in how you were treated?
	8 Motherhood penalties a widely researched and empirically proven to be true. Given that there is a lot of discourse around involved fatherhood and parental policies for men, have you ever observed or experienced the 'fatherhood penalty' in the workplace?
	9 In relation to fathers of larger families, do you feel there is a relationship between earning potential and family size?
9 (a)	Two candidates with equal KSA and experience apply for a position. One has no children, one has five. Who do you perceive as the stronger candidate and why?
10	Was paternity leave around when you had your children? Was it difficult to take and did gender impact your decision or experience?
11	Ireland has traditionally been a patriarchal society operating on the breadwinner model for men. In terms of your experience or identity, how do you see yourself as a professional?
12	And then, as a father, how do you see yourself?
13	Was it difficult to wear the different hats, or identities, of being a leader of men and a father? Did they cross over at work or at home or were they two distinct identities?
14	Finally, they say life must be lived forward but can only be understood backwards. As a father and a successful leader, what would you do differently &/or what advice would you give your younger self?

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview for up to two weeks after the interview.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I agree to my interview being recorded, transcribed and anonymised.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in a *dissertation* that will be publicly available on NCI dissertation database

William Moran – Masters of Business Administration

National College of Ireland

Email: X22160809@student.ncirl.ie

Signature of research participant & Date

.....

Signature of researcher & Date

.....



