Do children and careers mix? A working mother's perspective

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To all my classmates, we finally did it

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Abstract

The overall objective of this dissertation is to identify if working women themselves feel that their careers have suffered as a direct result of having children There exists an array of theory and literature in regard to the barriers working mothers face on return to work after having children and the hampering these barriers can do to women's careers However, this dissertation aims to link the literature to the subjects themselves and identify if the subjects do indeed feel that their careers have suffered since having children

A mono-method approach was used using qualitative methods and analysis A total of nine women were interviewed from all different industries and age groups

The findings of this research were analysed in-depth and very much supported the majority of the literature bar a few As a result of having children the women interviewed felt their careers had suffered They also felt that they have been excluded from certain networking groups as a result of having children and that this has possibly restricted their opportunities Mentors were identified as aid in their career progression

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Introduction

When questioned on giving a pregnant woman a full-time position Lord Alan Sugar said *"She wouldn't be able to do it, would she? Well, yes, you'd hire her and then she'd go on maternity leave"* (Wilson 2011) If this is the attitude of one of the leading business tycoons out there, do working mothers have the chance of proving themselves in senior level positions or are their career's over after they have children?

Gone are the days of insuring your pension and future by having numerous kids and women being restricted to home-makers and here are the days of free education, equality in the workforce and mothers having careers after having their children, or is it? This research aims to identify if today's working mothers in Ireland feel their careers have suffered since having children

Research Title Do children and careers mix? A working mother's perspective

Research Question Do working mothers feel their careers have suffered since having children

Research aims and objectives This research wishes to identify if working mothers feel their careers have suffered since having children This research aims to understand the phenomenon from the subject's point of view The researcher aims to identify the factors contributing to women's careers suffering after having children, if they do indeed feel their careers have suffered The researcher also aims to identify if women feel they have been faced by barriers to career progression since having children

Shirley (1994 38) has identified top female executives now in their fifties as "pioneers" to working women These women have rose to unchartered territory and have given their male counter-parts real competition in the promotion and leader stakes but does this still apply to

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women after they have had children? If Marissa Mayer is anything to go by yes! Marissa Mayer left her position as head of Local, Maps, and Location Services for Google, was publicly named the new chief of Yahoo—starting the very next day—and announced that she is six months pregnant, all in the same day (Goudreau 2012) Mayer joins a small-but-growing group of women leading major public companies in the U S of A However, she sets a precedent as the first woman to ever take the top position while pregnant But will having her first baby impact her performance or perception as the strong leader that Yahoo desperately needs? There are many people waiting for her to fail (Goudreau 2012) Mayer told Yahoo about her pregnancy back in June when the recruitment process started, which legally she did not have to do, but says that Yahoo kept her in the position prospects which showed their "evolved thinking" (Mayer cited by Goudreau 2012) Is Yahoo paving the way from a more 'pregnant friendly' organisations? If a male leader who was about to have a baby with his wife there would probably be no mention of it but because Mayer is a women immediately her commitment and ability is called into question Deborah Kolb says it is completely different to that of a male counterpart's wife having a child saying "There is something about motherhood," she says, "When you have a first child, it changes your life in some way It changes how you think about yourself" (Kolb cited by Goudreau 2012) While a new female CEO is common, a pregnant one is rare However there are many women CEO's who do indeed have children, which seems to contradict the literature in this area and notion that women can't have it all, children and be at a senior level Is this just a sign of changing times? Slaughter (2012) disagrees, saying that even today in 2012 women can't have it all Slaughter says "the women who have managed to be both mothers and top professionals are superhuman, rich, or self-employed " A high flying career working mother of two, Slaughter (2012) says that her home life had suffered dramatically for her career with her living in an entire different state during the week to her family She states that during her time working in

Washington DC "I was increasingly aware that the feminist beliefs on which I had built my entire career were shifting under my feet " Finally in 2011 she was finished and returned home to New Jersey to her family with the conclusion that "juggling high-level government work with the needs of two teenage boys was not possible "

As we can see the argument of whether women can have it all is a heated one with some women proving to be 'super-human' as Slaughter (2012) describes them, and some women stepping back in order for a happy home life This research aims to identify how working mothers or Ireland feel about the careers and home lives and do they feel they have it all?

Literature Review

Introduction

Shirley (1994 38) identified that top female executives who are now in their fifties can be called "pioneers" for working women in the workforce today These women rose to unchartered terntory and helped generations to follow break through the glass-ceiling, if only partially While these women have paved the way for working women to achieve the career progression they deserve and break down certain barriers that would have previously restricted their careers, it still seems today that working mother's careers are restricted in a number of ways A study conducted by Buckley Leahy and Linehan (2011) found that the majority of the women that were involved in their study acknowledged that their careers had suffered since having children There are a number of reasons for this and it has been reported that women who take time out of the labour force to have and care for children face considerable barriers when they return and the career prospects for these women can prove to be very complex (Buckley et al 2011) However can a lagging career be solely blamed on others or do women themselves choose to take a step back due to family commitments? This study looks to investigate this in detail The first step is to analyse the literature surrounding the area and draw out themes that will then allow the researcher to progress in the investigation The literature will be divided into the following themes and addressed separately, societal views on women and stereotyping, work-life balance, barriers facing women in the workforce in Ireland, worldwide barriers, access to international assignments and careers, the protean career, networking, and mentors

Societal views on women and stereotyping

Traditionally women's role in society was that of a mother and homemaker, their role was in the family and in the home and their male counterparts role was in the workforce (Linehan and Scullion 2001) In Ireland the view was that once women had children, they stayed at

home to care for them and inevitably their career ceased to exist as a consequence of this (Buckley et al 2011) However, as Buckley et al (2011) have identified, this is no longer the case and many women in society today are choosing to return to work after having children and carrying on with their careers Why is this? Society has evolved from the days of set roles and it is now more socially acceptable for women to continue to work after having children The way in which women worked has changed dramatically over the last sixty years and Adler (2002) identified this noting that organisations have shifted from reactive compliance to proactively initiated competitive strategies showing somewhat of a social acceptance of working mothers in the labour force from organisations as a whole The focus on women has shifted from recruiting lower-level women, who were expected to fit in, to hiring promoting and retaining women increasingly for global senior level positions who could "change the organisation" (Adler 2002 756) However, as Ogden, McTavish and McKean (2006) have identified, today, there are still some andro-centric (male centred) views present in society, which indicates support to the inappropriateness of women with children, especially young small children, in senior level positions Ogden et al (2006 50) identified that when the respondents of their study thought of senior level women they thought of "childless superwomen" not working mothers Can this societal perception last in today's reality or into the future? Will it ever be 100% equal for men and women in the workforce when children are involved or will one always have to take a back seat? And what might be the consequence of this? These questions are for a later study as this study is aiming to identify if working mothers today in Ireland feel that having a child has meant sacrificing their careers

Work-life balance

Work-life balance can be defined as "the sense of balance and satisfaction employees experience between their work / professional and personal lives When the demands of work and life exist in harmony with each other, then work-life balance is achieved" (Grady,

McCarthy, Darcy and Kirrane 2008 3) In the study conducted by Ogden et al (2006) the majority of the female respondents did not feel that they had a satisfactory work life balance Given that there seems to be a better balance in gender today in the labour force and more and more women are choosing to go back to work after having children, you would assume that the child rearing responsibilities would balance between the mother and father more, but this does not seem to be the case Buckley et al (2011) identified that today, it is still the mother who will reduce her working hours or rearrange her working arrangements to be more flexible so as to take care of the child rather than the father In today's working world often, "the childcare is not divided equally" (Buckley et al 2011 2) Why is this? Even with greater gender equality in the labour force, why is it that the mothers working patterns are the ones disrupted? Drew and Daverth (2009) came to similar conclusions during their study and found that the uptake of flexible working arrangements tends to be still highly gendered, that gender being female Drew and Daverth (2009) also identified that it still remains more common for women to make adjustments to their working patterns in regard to the responsibilities of the household Buckley et al (2011) found that reconciling work and family life one of the most dominating obstacles women face in relation to recruitment and promotion Work-life balance policies and family friendly policies are not always of benefit to women with Lewis (2001) discovering that many people are not comfortable in availing of these policies due to how they might be perceived, this however will be dealt with under barrier, perceptions Eikhof (2012 7) found that knowledge work, ICT and work-life balance policies in theory should increase the "temporal and geographical flexibility of work" thus enhancing flexibility and facilitating women's participation and advancement in work and therefore gender equality However, Eikhof (2012) found that all three trends have hidden gender consequences that significantly prevent women from participating and advancing Achieving the opposite of what they are designed to do

Barriers facing women in the workforce in Ireland

There are many barriers that face women in the workplace and to investigate them in a greater depth they will be looked at under three separate headings, self-imposed barriers, organisational barriers and perceptions

Organisational Barriers

The career prospects for women returning to work from maternity leave can prove to be very complex On their return to work from maternity leave, women are not encouraged to progress with their careers and 'pick up where they left off' and this was discovered during a study conducted by Buckley et al (2011) Why is this? Are the perceptions of women outlined by Ogden et al (2006) above effecting the encouragement of organisations to help their staff reach their full potentials? Do the organisations themselves see it as inappropriate to have women with children at senior levels? According to Bennett (2009) it would appear so Bennett (2009) discovered during research that only one in three mothers said re-entry into their old job is easy when returning to work from maternity leave and 39% of the respondents used in this particular research found it difficult or very difficult Many of the respondents of this research found that their relationship with their boss deteriorated dramatically since becoming pregnant as their commitment was then questioned Why is this? Is this because of barriers meeting them from the organisation? Is it the perceptions of co-workers and their organisations that is making the transition difficult and deteriorating relationships? Or is it in fact their own attitudes affecting the return to work experience? All of these aspects will be addressed in regard to barriers facing women on returning to work after maternity leave A third of the respondents from the study conducted by Bennett (2009) also felt that their promotional prospects had reduced significantly after having a baby which reinforces the findings of Buckley et al (2011) that women are not encouraged enough to progress on their return to work from maternity leave Kimmel (2006) also found that due to having children

women are often passed over for promotion due to having primary responsibilities at home

In order to have access to promotions and to move into more senior levels within an organisation mothers need to have access to affordable childcare and flexible childcare support and this is not always available This is resulting in many women accepting that in order to balance work and home life their aim cannot be to progress above the level they are in Although family friendly policies are there to help parents in organisations they seem to have more of a hindering affect sometimes and this was discovered by Lewis (2001) who found that although they are available to women to aid them some women do not want to avail of these policies so they are not perceived differently and this will be looked at in more depth when the researcher addresses the area of perceptions Not only are women sometimes reluctant to avail of these policies etc sometimes the culture of the organisation can have a huge effect on these policies and undermine what the policies are trying to achieve and facilitate This again was discovered by Lewis (2001) For example the andro-centric (male centred) views Ogden et al (2006) identified earlier could play a huge part in undermining the policies and provoking a culture that undermines women's participation in the workforce This is reiterated by the work of Cooper-Jackson (2001) who found that the beliefs and attitudes held by organisational members and contextual aspects of the organisation contribute to the barriers that impede women's career advancement – the so called 'glass-ceiling' Ragins, Townsend and Mattis (1998) also found corporate culture to be one of the primary barriers to women's advancement in their careers It is important to note that the notion of the glass-ceiling does not only apply to women with children it is also can apply to childless women in the workforce, having a child can just act as an added barrier to this ceiling Cross and Linehan (2006) found that attitudinal biases can create an unsupportive working environment which can inhibit a working mothers performance which can lead to the blocking of promotion prospects to that oh her male counterparts This again leads the

researcher to look back upon the notion of societal views of women Are these corporate cultures prevailing because people are still looking at women as mothers and homemakers and not as equals in the labour force? Or are the women themselves playing a part in reinforcing this stereotype? As Ogden et al (2006 50) discovered the perceptual barrier faced by women is only reinforced by "the reluctance of some women to incur the perceived cost of more senior positions, in terms of the negative impact on their work life balance"

Self-imposed barriers

Not all barriers women are met by are from the organisation they also erect barriers themselves The respondents of the research conducted by Buckley et al (2011) identified that since they had become mothers their priorities had changed to suit the needs and wants of their families and this has put a huge restraint on them applying for promotions This study found that women's choice not to progress is in fact one of the greatest barriers they face and one of the reasons women do not progress into higher positions As has been identified, yes there are barriers facing women returning to work but one of the main barriers hindering their progression is the self-imposed barrier, their choice to let their careers take a back seat But is this a choice that they are happy with or a choice that society has forced them to make? This is what the researcher wishes to address, do women feel that since having their children their careers have suffered and if so are they happy to let this happen? The study conducted by Crowley-Henry (2011) confirms this notion Crowley-Henry (2011 7) found that women admit to having to "make choices with regards to their careers, and proactively choose courses of action that facilitate their life priorities at different stages of their lives" As we have identified an organisation can impose a glass-ceiling, which restricts women from progressing in their careers, but it is very important to note that women themselves can impose their own glass-ceilings in front of their progression prospects (Cross and Linehan 2006) Ogden et al (2006) found that women do indeed self-limit their career progression but

the respondents saw it as a positive choice in order to have reasonably happy work life balance

Perceptions

The way women feel that they may be perceived can act as a huge barrier to their career progression As we have identified already, more and more companies are developing family friendly policies and work life balance policies in order to aid their workers who have families and children However, as Lewis (2001) has identified, a lot of women, and men, don't feel comfortable in availing of these policies because of the way they might be perceived, their commitment could be called into question This again takes the researcher back to look at the organisational culture and the effect the culture can have on the perceptions people have of working mothers and how the working mothers themselves feel they are perceived Marrujo and Kleiner (1992) found that women who emphasise family by rearranging their working arrangements or switch from full time to part time in order to facilitate their families are perceived by their companies to be less committed Does this apply to every sector? The researcher wishes to establish if this perception applies to all sectors and structures Another area of perceptions that emerged is the area of strategic decision making Okanlawon (1994) identified that over the year's strategic decision making has become sex-typed as a masculine role with no place for women Is this another societal perception? Women are inadequate in making major decisions at senior levels in organisations? Or is this a cultural perception from organisations?

Organisational barriers, self-imposed barriers and perceptions are not the only barriers that emerged during the research of the literature but they are what seemed to be most documented Other things that emerged as barriers to women on the return to work from maternity leave include the access to affordable childcare Buckley et al (2011) established

that access to affordable and adequate childcare and other caring services are essential but also acknowledged them as a challenge to obtain rendering them barriers to women returning to work.

Worldwide Barriers

The barriers identified earlier are not only barriers faced by women in Ireland. Women on an international level meet these barriers too. In some cultures these barriers can be even more extreme and women do not have the opportunity to have a career at all. Linehan (2002) identified that breaking through the glass-ceiling was a sensational that women on an international level are facing not just women in Ireland. Why is this? Is this again linked to the cultures of international organisations or the societal views of international communities? A study conducted by Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) in a Malaysian oil company found that the women in this company were faced with the same barriers that were identified earlier, thus proving that these barriers can meet women on an international level. The respondents of the study carried out by Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) identified that their commitment to their families was the biggest barriers they faced as it obscured the perception people once had of them. This was also identified by Fischlmayr (2002) who found that barriers varied only slightly for women on an international level, the root of the barrier remained the same.

Access to international assignments and careers

When families are sent to live in different countries while one of the parents is on an international assignment it is usually the male partner that is on the assignment and the female partner and children have moved also. Women have to fight hard to be considered for international assignments and Fischlmayr (2002) found stereotypical beliefs and conservative attitudes as the main reason why companies do not send women on international assignments. This once again begs us to look at the cultures of organisations and their perceptions of working mothers and the views that society has on working mothers. Are these societal views

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shaping the cultures of organisations in regard to working mothers? A respondent of the study conducted by Taylor, Knox-Napier and Mayrhofer (2002 739) stated, "the most difficult job is getting sent, not succeeding once sent " This was also identified by Linehan (2002 809) who found that the women he interviewed felt that they were not considered for international assignments or promotions simply because they had children and found that they nearly had to "convince their home-country senior managers of their availability to partake in international assignments " Linehan (2002) identified four themes that emerged when investigating what cause difficulties for female international managers These themes are,

1   Creating options for the male trailing partner

2   Balancing the demands of an international career and maintaining a relationship and child raising

3   The overt and covert biases associated with international appointments

4   The negative impact of gender on female managers' international careers

The respondents of this research spoke of the role conflict they experienced between balancing the demands of a career, their home and their children As the researcher has identified earlier, work life balance is an important factor for women and looking at these four themes that have emerged here, could this be another reason why women are choosing to step back from their careers in order to have a more satisfactory work life balance, not just on an international basis but also on a domestic basis However, Makela, Suutari and Mayerhofer (2011) found that during international assignments females experience both conflicts and enrichments, not just negativity Makela et al (2011) found that different life and career stages appeared to be integral to these experiences This point has been stressed before, not just on an international level but also on a domestic level which brings the researcher on to look at the protean career

The Protean Career

The study conducted by Crowley-Henry (2011 7) found that women admit to having to "make choices with regards to their careers, and proactively choose courses of action that facilitate their life priorities at different stages of their lives " This is the grounding for the theory of the protean career The protean career concept refers to the ability to change and alter one's career path depending on life stage and circumstance and this is very applicable to women with careers and children (Hall and Harrington 2004) Crowley-Henry (2011) found that all respondents in their research were united by the concept of the protean career Crowley-Henry (2011) found that the relational and family context were critical as they defined the career priorities of the respondents and how they altered over time Could this concept of the protean career mean that in order for organisations to achieve gender equality they will possibly have to individualise and personalise career development planning for employees, especially women (Crowley-Henry 2011)

All respondents of the study conducted by Crowley-Henry (2011) spoke of how after having their children, they did not position their professional careers at the top of their priority lists anymore, they now put their families first

Networking

Networking plays a huge part in today's business world and can play a major role in the career progression of both males and females However, it is usually women who lag in this area as working mothers can find it hard to set aside time for networking outside of the hours of work (Buckley et al 2011) The respondents of a study conducted by Cross and Linehan 2006) firmly believe that informality in selection and promotion procedures is often at the root of gender segregation Networking plays a big part in this The study carried out by Ogden et al (2006) found that females do indeed encounter more barriers to career progression and this can be partially be linked to women's non-availability to certain

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networking groups Women regularly attend formal networking events but as most informal networking events occur out of normal office hours in social settings working mothers find themselves unable to partake in these networks simply because of family commitments This raises the issue of work life balance again and women taking on the majority of child rearing responsibilities If women didn't have the majority of the child rearing responsibilities would they be more available for informal networking events and would this in turn increase the promotional prospects? The work of Okanlawon (1994) correspond with that of Ogden et al (2006) identifying informal networking as a vital route to career progression and while women are strongly involved in formal networking, one of the most frequently reported issues facing women is their exclusion form informal networks, especially informal 'male' networks – the old boys club Crowley-Henry (2011) also found that a huge obstacle facing working women, not just working mothers, is the exclusion from informal male networks This again links back to the notion of barriers facing women in the workplace and stereotyping and societal views Wirth (2001) also found that women are less keen and have less time to participate in informal networking events, which can result in missed opportunities and promotions

Mentors

Climbing up the career ladder after having children can prove to be extremely difficult which was identified by Buckley et al (2011) but having some sort of guidance can prove of great benefit and this is where the notion of mentor and mentoring will be looked at Linehan (2002) found that the lack of mentors for women proved to be a major barrier in working mothers' career progression both on a domestic and international level

Now that the literature has been reviewed and themes have become evident and extracted, this allows the researcher to devise and interview guide that will best help to answer the research aims and objectives

Methodology

Introduction

Research methodology can be defined as signalling to the reader "how the research was conducted and what philosophical assumptions underpin the research" (Quinlan 2011 482) This is exactly what this chapter will do, detail the way in which this research was conducted and analysed in order to answer the research questions and objectives outlined previously This chapter outlines the researchers choice of methodology, including, philosophies, approaches, strategies, choices, time horizons and the techniques and procedures used Due to the complexity of the methodology section, and to ensure that the methods of research are outlined as simply and coherently as possible, the researcher will use Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2009) research onion (Appendix 1) to justify their approach This chapter posits the rationale for the data collection methods used

Problem definition is the stage at which the researcher decides what information is needed to solve the problem facing them, and this will result in a list of objectives (Domegan and Fleming 2007) These objectives have been previously outlined

Research Philosophy

Research philosophy relates to "the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009 107) As Saunders et al (2009) have identified, our values can play a huge part in what research philosophy we adopt "The research philosophy you adopt contains important assumptions about the way in which you view the world These assumptions will underpin your research strategy and the methods you choose as part of that strategy" (Saunders et al 2009 108) Saunders et al (2009 108) state that the main influence on your research philosophy is "your view of the relationship between knowledge and the process by which it is developed " Johnson and Clark (2006) argue that the important factor is the researcher's ability to reflect upon their philosophical choices and

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defend them in relation to any other alternatives that could have been adopted There are four philosophies which will be looked at and they are, pragmatism, realism, interpretivism and positivism Before looking at which philosophy is to be adopted it is important to understand the meanings of epistemology, ontology and axiology, as they will have a huge effect on which philosophy is adopted by a researcher

Epistemology relates to "knowledge, to what constitutes knowledge, and to the process through which knowledge is created" (Quinlan 2001 96) Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, "this raises questions of the assumptions researchers have about the way the world operates and the commitment held to particular views" (Saunders et al 2009 110) Ontology is a branch of metaphysics that deals with "the nature of existence" (Jankowicz 2005 106) There are two aspects of ontology objectivism and subjectivism Objectivism is how social entities exist independent of social actors and subjectivism is, understanding the meanings that are attached to social phenomena by individuals (Saunders et al 2009) Axiology is concerned with the role our values play in our research choices, "it is a branch of philosophy that studies judgements about value" (Saunders et al 2009 116)

Pragmatism

The first philosophy looked at is pragmatism Pragmatism argues that the most important factor, when deciding what approach to adopt in relation to epistemology, ontology and axiology, is the research question itself (Saunders et al 2009) Pragmatism believes that it is possible to use different types of philosophies when answering particular research questions as one may be more suitable than the other when answering particular questions (Saunders et al 2009)

Positivism

Positivism reflects the philosophical stance of the natural scientist (Saunders et al 2009) Positivists like "working with an observable social reality and that the end product of such research can be law-like generalisations similar to those produced by the physical and natural scientists" (Remenyi, Williams, Money and Swartz 1998 32) When developing research strategies to obtain data positivists are likely to use existing theory to develop hypotheses (Saunders et al 2009) Positivists believe "that in the world we live in there are universal truths and that research goals should discover the laws of the universe relating to these universal truths" (Horn 2009 108) Positivists are concerned with facts rather than impressions An important factor to note of the positivist approach to research is that "the research is undertaken, as far as possible, in a value-free way" (Saunders et al 2009 114) "The researcher is independent of and neither affects nor is affected by the subject of the research" (Remenyi et al 1998 33)

Realism

Realism, another philosophical position that relates to scientific enquiry (Saunders et al 2009) Realism adopts the stance that "there is a reality that is separate from our descriptions of it" (Bryman and Bell 2007 18) "The philosophy of realism is that there is a reality quite independent of the mind" (Saunders et al 2009 114) Realism is a branch of epistemology similar to positivism in the way that it assumes a scientific approach to knowledge development (Bryman and Bell 2007) There are two forms of realism, direct realism and critical realism Direct realism takes the stance of "what you see is what you get what we experience through our senses portrays the world accurately" (Saunders et al 2009 114) Critical realism argues, "what we experience are sensations, the images of the things in the real world, not the things directly" (Saunders et al 2009 115) The difference between the two is that critical realists believe that there are two steps to experiencing the world, direct realists

believe only in the first step The first step is the actual thing itself and the sensations it conveys Direct realists believe that this step is enough but critical realists believe that there is a second step involved which is the mental processing of the sensation after the sensation meets the senses (Saunders et al 2009)

Interpretivism

"Interpretivism advocates that it is necessary for the researcher to understand differences between humans in our role as social actors This emphasises the difference between conducting research among people rather than objects" (Saunders et al 2009 116) Interpretivists believe that humans interpret the world in a particular way and act out their 'part' in society in accordance with their interpretation Interpretivism stems from two intellectual traditions, phenomenology and symbolic interactions Interpretivists believe "that reality is socially constructed" (Fisher 2007 20) It is important for researchers adopting an interpretivist philosophy to adopt an empathetic stance (Saunders et al 2009) Interpretivists are attempting to understand the social world of the research subjects from their point of view (Saunders et al 2009) The interpretivist approach is dynamic where there may be a wide range of interpretations of realities (Malhorta and Birks 2005)

The researcher has adopted that of an interpretivist philosophy The reason being that the researcher wishes to understand the world from the subject's point of view, the researcher wants to understand working women's perceptions on whether or not they encountered barriers on their return to work following maternity leave The researcher wants to identify what the respondents feel and view about the situation and explore their world from inside their world and this falls under the philosophy of interpretivism Adopting an interpretivist philosophy best suits the research questions and objectives at hand

Research Approach

The research approaches available are deductive research and inductive research. A deductive approach to research is when "a conclusion is drawn that necessarily follows in logic from the premises that are stated" (Fisher 2007:94). An inductive approach to research is when the researcher collects data and develops a theory as a result of the data analysis (Saunders et al 2009). Deductive approaches to research are more in line with the philosophy of positivism and inductive approaches are more in line with the philosophy of interpretivism (Saunders et al 2009).

Deduction: Deduction owes more to scientific research (Saunders et al 2009). Deduction involves developing a theory and testing that theory, it does not depend on observation or experience (Fisher 2007). Robson (2002) identified five stages at which deductive research goes through. These stages are:

1. Deducing a hypothesis from the theory surrounding the area.
2. Expressing the hypothesis in operational terms, indicating how the hypothesis is to be measured.
3. Testing the operational hypothesis.
4. Examining the specific outcomes of the inquiry.
5. If necessary, modifying the theory in light of the findings (Robson 2002).

One of the main characteristics of deductive approaches to research is that deduction searches to explain "casual relationships between variables" (Saunders et al 2009:125). Another characteristic of deductive research is the use of quantitative methods of data collection, however it would be wrong to believe that qualitative data collection methods cannot be used (Fisher 2007). Saunders et al (2009) identify that in order to pursue the principle of scientific rigour, "deduction dictates that the researcher should be independent of what is being

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observed" (Saunders et al 2009:125). In a deductive approach to research, concepts need to be operationalized in a way that enables facts to be measured quantitatively (Fisher 2007). Another important characteristic of deduction is generalization. Saunders et al (2009:125) state that "in order to be able to generalise statistically about regularities in human social behaviour it is necessary to select samples of sufficient numerical size".

Induction: An inductive approach to research can be defined as "a study in which theory is developed from the observation of empirical reality; thus general inferences are induced from particular instances" (Collis and Hussey 2009:335). Using an inductive approach to research means that theory would follow data rather than data following theory as it would with a deductive approach. One of the strengths of induction is the belief that understanding the way in which humans interpret their social world is essential to research (Saunders et al 2009). Believers in induction criticise deduction for its rigour in methodology that does not permit alternative explanations as to what might be going on (Saunders et al 2009). Research using an inductive approach is more likely to be concerned with the context in which events are taking place (Cameron and Price 2009). Due to induction being concerned with the context in which events take place, it is plausible to study a small sample of subjects as it might be more appropriate (Cameron and Price 2009). Researchers using an inductive approach are more likely to use qualitative methods of data collection, however once again it should be noted that this does not mean that quantitative data collection methods cannot be used.

It is possible to combine both deductive and inductive research approaches but for the purpose of this research, the researcher took an inductive approach. The answers to the research questions are unknown and to identify answers the researcher is conducting inductive research to identify and develop the theory from the empirical evidence. Using an inductive approach allows the researcher to get a feel of what is going on and better understand the nature of the findings concluded. It allows the researcher to develop a theory.

Using an inductive approach allows the researcher to understand how the subjects of the research interpret the world around them and the context of the situation and develop their theory from here Using an inductive approach will allow the researcher to adapt the data collection method suitably to the subjects to give a wider view of the situation An inductive approach will allow the researcher to develop their theory by approaching the matter from the eyes of the subjects

The way in which we ask the research question results in descriptive, exploratory or explanatory answers This leads us to look at the purpose of the research The purpose of the research will determine whether or not it is descriptive, exploratory or explanatory (Saunders et al 2009) Exploratory studies are valuable means of finding out what is happening (Saunders et al) Descriptive studies are used to "portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations" (Robson 2002 59) Finally, explanatory studies are studies that "establish casual relationships between variables" (Saunders et al 2009 140)

This research is an exploratory study as the researcher wants to gain in depth knowledge and information and insight into the subject of research Robson (2002 59) defines an exploratory study as "a valuable means of finding out what is happening, to seek new insights, to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light " Domegan and Fleming (2007) note that this approach to research is especially useful when trying to identify shifts in cultural values and changing attitudes This is perfectly suited to the research being conducted as the researcher is trying to establish any changes in attitudes towards working mothers, and changes to values and perceptions

Research Strategy

The choice of research strategy adopted will be determined by a number of factors, the research questions and objectives, existing knowledge, time and resources available and

one's own philosophical stance (Saunders et al 2009) One research strategy is not better than another, what is most important is whether or not the strategy chosen will enable a researcher to answer their particular questions and meet their objectives (Saunders et al 2009) The are many research strategies including, experiments, surveys, case studies, action research, grounded theory, ethnography and archival research

Experiments The purpose of an experiment is to study casual links i e whether a change in one independent variable produces a change in another dependent variable (Hakim 2000)

Surveys Surveys are usually associated with the deductive approach (Saunders et al 2009) They are used to answer "who, what, where, how much, and how many questions" (Saunders et al 2009) It tends to be used for descriptive and exploratory research (Domegan and Fleming 2007)

Case Studies Robson (2002 178) defines a case study as "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence "

Action Research· Saunders et al (2009 587) define action research as "a research strategy concerned with the management of a change and involving close collaboration between practitioners and researchers "

Grounded Theory A grounded theory strategy is helpful for research to predict and explain behaviour, developing and building theory (Goulding 2002) Grounded theory is often thought of as the best example of the inductive approach to research (Cameron and Price 2009) Theory is developed from data generated by a series of observations It is building theory However as Suddaby (2006) noted, grounded theory does not mean that the literature should be ignored

Ethnography Ethnography "emanates from the field of anthropology" (Saunders et al 2009 149) The purpose of ethnography is to try and describe and explain the social world inhabited by the research subjects in the way in which the subjects themselves would describe it (Saunders et al 2009) It is very time consuming

Archival Research Is research using administrative records and documents as the primary and principle source of data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson 2008)

For the purpose of this research, the researcher chose a grounded theory strategy as it best suits the research to be embarked upon The researcher wishes to observe the participants and build the theory upon the findings Grounded theory is particularly helpful for research to predict and explain behaviour and the researcher is trying to do exactly that, explain the behaviour of both organisations and working mothers Using a grounded theory approach will allow the researcher to answer their research objectives

Research Choices

The research choice refers to the data collection and analysis approach the researcher wishes to adopt The choice can be either quantitative or qualitative Saunders et al (2009 151) define quantitative data as "a synonym for any data collection technique (such as a questionnaire) or data analysis procedure (such as graphs or statistics) that generates or uses numerical data " Qualitative on the other hand is the opposite It is the data collection technique and analysis procedure that generates or use non-numerical data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson 2008)

Due to this research falling under the realm of interpretivism, a qualitative approach will be used as the researcher wishes to view the world from the subject's point of view and get in depth knowledge on the situation

A mono-method, qualitative approach will be used Saunders et al (2009 151) define a mono-method approach as "using a single data collection technique and corresponding analysis procedure "

The other choices to that of a mono-method approach is a multi-method approach or a mixed method approach A multi-method approach is when a researcher uses more than one approach, but of only one research choice i e qualitative or quantitative A mixed method approach is when both qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures and data analysis approaches are used (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson 2008)

The researcher will conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews to allow them to get an in-depth understanding of the situation from the respondent's point of view and it allows the researcher to become flexible when needed to different respondents

Time Horizons

Research studies can be either cross-sectional or longitudinal Cross-sectional studies are studies of a particular phenomenon or phenomena at a particular time, i e a snap-shit in time (Hussey and Hussey 1997) Longitudinal studies happen over a length of time Saunders et al (2009 155) say that the main strength of longitudinal research is "the capacity that it has to study change and development" this is not the case with cross-sectional studies as they are only a 'snap-shot' in time For the purpose of this research a cross-sectional approach has been adopted The reason for a cross-sectional approach is due to the deadline attached to this piece of academic research, August 31st 2012 Cross-sectional studies may use qualitative methods, which lines up with the intended methods being used by the researcher

Methodological approach to this research, process adopted and steps taken

Step one – Literature review This first step was to research the literature surrounding my area of interest This involved looking at all relevant academic literature

Step two – Grouping themes This step involved grouping the common themes that emerged together so that the literature could be understood and analysed in a clear and coherent manner

Step three – Informed interview guide This is the stage at which the interview guide for the research was drawn up using the literature reviewed in the previous steps The research objectives of this research also were used to draw up the question to ensure that the questions answered the objectives

Step four – Conducted interviews Nine women were chosen to part take in this research The women were all of different ages and backgrounds and professions so that there is no stereotyping i e women over thirty or women in the public sector

When conducting the interviews the researcher ensured to eliminate bias by using open-ended question to allow the interviewers to answer honestly and openly without feeling restricted by the questions asked Asking open-ended questions means that you are not leading the answers in any way

The interviews were all recorded to ensure the appropriate and correct analysing of the data occurred

Copies of the interview guide were also given to the participants in case they wanted them for their own records and future reference

Step five – Analysis When analysing the data common themes were grouped together, similar to the way in which themes were grouped together during the literature review The themes where then grouped and noted and compared to the literature reviewed regarding the topic

Findings and Discussions

Introduction

This section deals with the findings of the research after the analysing was completed It is divided into themes that emerged These themes are, changing priorities, perceptions, barriers faced returning to work after maternity leave, issues faced returning to work, work-life balance, organisation structure, the effects of mentoring, networking and suffering careers, can women have it all?

Changing Priorities

When asked if having children had affected their career in anyway, all nine respondents answered yes but for different reasons The common theme that emerged between all nine respondents was that since having children their priorities have changed The main priority now for all women is their children and this is the main way their careers have been affected since having children This was perceived to be one of the biggest barriers facing women returning to work after having children by the research carried out by Ismail and Ibrahim (2008)

One woman, respondent B, spoke of how she had her child at a young age and if she had waited a bit longer that she would of continued on with education but due to her having her child young she needed to be able to support her financially so education ceased Respondent B spoke about having a job more so than a career due to having her child *"I would probably be on the path to having more of a career more so than a job "*

Two women, respondents D and F, said that they working weeks were cut from full time positions to part time positions but by their own choice They both acknowledged that their priorities had changed and focus was on their children and both women chose to cut their working week Respondent F spoke of the impact having a child had on her managerial

perspectives saying, *"I had trained to be a manager and would have been in a manager position but I couldn't do full time because I had a child "*

Respondent G spoke of how changing priorities meant that her career path had to change as it no longer made financial sense and plausibility to continue down the path she was on with a child

Respondent I spoke of how people's perceptions of her in her organisation have change since having a child She is looked at now as being in her *"child bearing years"* and because of this she feels *"there is a reluctance to get me involved in big projects 'cause everybody's kind of meeting me with kid gloves "* which has affected her career

It is important to note that while all women said their careers have been affected and that this is mainly due to changing priorities they all stressed that this has been their own choice

This finding links into the notion of the protean career discussed in the literature review chapter Crowley-Henry (2011 7) state that women "make choices with regard to their careers, and proactively choose courses of action that facilitate their life priorities at different stages of their lives "

When asked about the importance of a good childcare system a unanimous answer of *"definitely"* was received The respondents all said that having a good childcare system in place was an essential element in allowing them to go back to work as it meant they could focus on their work knowing their children were happy and safe Is this because their children are now their main priorities so once they know they are happy they can concentrate on work? This would have to be looked at in a further study

When asked if their organisations offered childcare would they avail of it only seven of the nine respondents answered yes as they felt convenience would play a huge part However the

two that answered no said so because they felt that their personal live and professional lives should be kept separate Respondent H stated that "*local child care is the way to go*" and respondent I said it was all about "*perceptions*" which leads the researcher on to look at the next common theme that emerged from all respondents, perceptions of others

Perceptions

The theme of perceptions was evident throughout all the interviews conducted in nearly all areas In relation to how perceptions have impacted in the returning to work experience, respondent I said that one of the main issues she faced when returning to work after having her child was the way in which she was now perceived Respondent I stated that in order to see her child she now leaves the office at 4 45pm but to help reduce scrutiny and other office members looking at her different she starts her day at 7am and usually works through her lunch Even though she is still doing more than the legal required working hours she still feels that people are looking at her different now due to her having a child and this is a worry to her This is identified in the study of Ogden et al (2006) who found that there were still a lot of male centred, andro-centric views of the inappropriateness of women with young children in management positions She hates the way she is perceived when she leaves early and "*doesn't want to put her hand up because she doesn't want to be seen as weakening*"

When asked if they would return to work early after maternity leave six of the respondents said no and three said maybe, that it depended on the situation However when asked if they felt their commitment would be questioned if they didn't return early they all agreed that yes their commitment would be questioned Research conducted by Bennett (2009) confirms this saying that once women leave for maternity leave their commitment is questioned and this was also identified by Buckley et al (2011) Respondent H stated that she wouldn't leave it *too long*" because of people's perceptions and she wouldn't want to be "*forgotten about* " Respondent C said that she was in fact asked to return to work early from unpaid maternity

leave and said that when she refused the organisation tried very hard to try and convince her but when she reused again she felt she was then *"at the mercy of my boss"* on return

When asked about their feelings on family friendly policies in organisations and flexible working arrangements respondents E, F, H and felt that although they can be of benefit to women they can also as respondent H stated *"hinder women in a big way"* due to perceptions This is backed up by the work of Lewis (2001) who found that family friendly policies are only hampering women's progression and transition back into the workforce after having a child Respondent G stated, *"they have a long way to go "* Respondent H felt that although you're manager might be smiling at you telling you everything is fine for you to avail of that flexi-time behind that smile they're thinking *"well Jesus I don't want this one promoted much higher if she's not going to be around "* Therefore due to these perceptions when asked if they would avail of flexible working arrangements most respondents were wary of availing due to the perceptions others might have of them This is in direct confliction with the work of Eikhof (2012) who found that flexibility and choice in working arrangements are regarded as a key facilitator for balancing work and family demands Yes they may be good in retrospect but are of no use if women are afraid to avail of them because of how they will be perceived Respondent C stated that she wouldn't want to *"push the boundaries too much, don't want people thinking this one is taking the biscuit "* Respondent E also felt the same stating that her *"commitment would be questioned if there was too much manoeuvring "* Respondent F felt the same stating that when she did avail of flexible working arrangements her commitment was *"definitely questioned "* This was identified in the study of Lewis (2001) who found that although there plenty of family friendly policies in place to facilitate working mothers and fathers many women today still feel uneasy in taking them up in fear of how they may be perceived However this is not the response of all respondents and the remaining felt that family friendly policies are of actual benefit and would avail of

flexible working arrangements depending on the situation Perceptions was identified as a barrier faced when returning to work after having children and the area of barriers will now be looked at

Barriers faced returning to work after maternity leave

When asked about the barriers they faced on returning to work following maternity leave it seems three themes have emerged and these are, organisational barriers, indirect barriers (perceptions) and self-imposed barriers

Organisational Barriers Respondents A, B, D, F and G did not mention organisational barriers In fact respondent B talked about how flexible the organisation was towards her on her return and made things easy on her Respondent C, however, talked of how she felt since returning to work she had become restricted in movement and once again how she was *"at the mercy of her boss "* Respondent H talked about how you can be forgotten about very quickly and this can make things very difficult when returning especially in the industry she works in which has an *"old boy's club mentality "* This can be linked to the andro-centric views identified by Ogden et al (2006) Respondent I said that she has been met with a resistance to put her on big accounts because people are worried about *"is she going to leave again?"* This can be related to corporate culture, which Ragins et al (1998) identified as one of the primary barriers to working mother's advancements in their careers

Indirect barriers Respondent E spoke about indirect barriers in the sense of the way people are looking at you and perceiving you and how you might be looked at differently now and looked over *"you can feel people looking at you for example if you have to leave early, you can just feel it "* Kleiner (1992) found that women who do avail of flexible working arrangements etc are considered uncommitted to their position by the company and fellow employees Respondent G spoke about the gap in her career after taking time out after having

her child and trying to explain that gap at interviews without getting to personal so that you are not perceived differently

Respondent B felt that she was faced with a lot of barriers but that they were all brought upon by herself Trying to do it all and staying up all night just to be ready for the next day but ending up falling behind due to exhausted were all barriers spoke about by respondent B As mentioned before the career gap faced by respondent G, she felt was a self-imposed barrier as she chose to take a break and now that break is affecting her progression Another thing that emerged linked to self-imposed barriers was the feeling of guilt the respondents felt in missing out of their children's childhood Respondents A, B, D and G all felt that guilt played a big part in their career advancements and felt because of this they have restricted the advancements Respondents C and F said they didn't feel guilt played a part at all because they chose to take a step back in their careers and they don't feel guilt played a part in making this decision Respondent H said that it wasn't guilt that made her step back from her career she said if she were to continue at the level she was at *"I physically wouldn't ever see my kids!"* This was identified by the study of Ogden et al (2006) who found that women do have a reluctance to move on to more senior levels in their career because of the negative impact it would have on their home lives Respondent I agreed

Issues faced when returning to work

The main issues the women of this study found when returning to work after having children was trying to balance everything and being organised This however was not the only issue raised Respondent D spoke of having *"a lack of confidence returning to work"* and trying to *"fit back in "* Respondent F spoke about the issue of being a single parent and attaining affordable childcare as being one of the main issues she was faced with This was also identified in the study conducted by Crowley-Henry (2011) where one respondent identified that in order to move higher in organisations working mothers need to have access to

affordable and flexible childcare Respondent G spoke about the financial constraint issues she faced being a single parent was very costly Respondent H spoke about the difficulty in trying to pick up where she left off and loosing contacts, which she also identified as a *"huge barrier in returning to work "* Although many issues arose the main issue was trying to balance everything, which leads us on to look at the next theme that emerged, work life balance

Work-Life Balance

When asked if they feel they have achieved a work life balance they are happy with every respondent said yes but not one respondent said they are one hundred per cent happy Every respondent said they are happy but it could be better Respondent E said it is *"very tough never going to be 100% happy "* Respondent H said that although she is happy at the moment if she wanted her career to ever reach the level of intensity it once was at she would be *"committing suicide here is the house, it wouldn't be worth it "* Ironically respondent I spoke of how her life is more balanced since she had the baby because before that she could work nearly twenty-hour days After looking at work life balance and seeing that the respondents were, for the most part, happy, the researcher looked on to look at the balance of responsibility in the family homes

When asked who took on the majority of the child raising responsibilities all but one respondent said themselves This was also identified by Drew and Daverth (2009) who found that today it still remains the norm for women to adjust their working patterns due to them taking on the majority of the child rearing responsibilities This however was for different reasons When asked if they feel because of this their careers had suffered the response was mixed Respondent C stated that *"because my husband is the bread winner I have had to step back"* and this was also the case for respondent E who stated that *"you can only let one person excel in their career if you want to have kids and I chose to let me husband excel, but*

that was my choice I was happy with " Respondent B also agreed that her career was the one to suffer but stated that *"I chose it this way, I felt it was my job to be at home and be the mother"* why she felt this way is for a later investigation Respondents F and G are both single parents who had *"no choice"* but to take on the majority of child raising responsibility and thus have hindered career advancements Respondent I was the exception Respondent I stated that she is the breadwinner in her household and since returning to work after maternity leave it is her husband who has taken on the majority of the child raising responsibilities Only one of the respondents interviewed said their partner availed of paternity leave after they had children, and that was only for a few days One respondent, respondent B spoke of how her partner had just begun a new job when their daughter was born and was afraid to ask for any paternity leave as he was afraid how he would be perceived as *"it's not the norm is it "* This is another area the researcher wishes to investigate at a later point

Organisational Structure

During the interviewing process it emerged that the structure of the different organisations played a big part in the return to work experience for the different respondents As mentioned above, all respondents perceived Family Friendly Policies in different ways and this is partially due to the structure of the individual organisations Respondent I works in a very high pressured fast pace private company, and although she has stated that she particularly feels scrutinized since returning to work from maternity leave she does this the Family Friendly Policies are having a slightly good effect due to more women being in high powered senior level positions in her organisation She also states however that she feels this could also be because *"people are so concerned with being politically correct"* so while it may all look well on the outside, underneath things could be very much so taboo, that however is for a future study

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The structure of each respondents work team also has had an impact on their return to work experience Respondent A stated that her section is mainly women and this has made it *"so much easier, they know "* Respondents C, D, E and F all agreed with respondent C stating *"it's all women in my section and everyone has kids so they know the score more understanding "* However respondent G found that in her section, which is mainly women, it can nearly make the return to the working world harder because *"sometimes women can be too empathetic, men aren't and therefore push you back into work mode "* Respondent B works in a section that is mainly men and has said that it has had no effect on her return to work experience but in past experiences *"women can be a lot more understanding '* This is reiterated by respondent H who states that her section is a mixture but mainly men and finds that there is a sense of *"an old boys club and men can be slightly resentful towards women "* Respondent H works in a section with a mixture again but mainly men and finds that it has not affected her return to work experience, as again *"people are so concerned with being politically correct "*

When asked if their companies were child friendly all respondents bar respondent F said that yes their companies were child friendly to a certain extent Respondent D spoke of how there is *"a fine line, they are friendly enough, when Rob (her son) had the swine flu I had to take two weeks off as no one was allowed to go near him and they made me take it out of my annual leave "* However respondent A spoke of how when she was heavily pregnant the company gave her a parking space so it would be easier for her getting to work Respondent F was the exception stating that her company was not child friendly at all and it made things very difficult at times

The effects of mentoring

After looking at the literature the researcher was keen to identify what women felt about the notion of mentoring Linehan (2002) identified that one of the aids for women to break

through the glass ceiling and progress in their careers was to have some sort of a female mentor While not all respondents could say they had a mentor in their careers all agreed that having one would of definitely been of benefit to career progression Respondent B spoke of how she "*sort of*" had a mentor, she had two both male and female and she feels it has been a "*huge benefit!*" Respondent C found that she had a family member who acted as a mentor as she was in the same profession and gave her sound advice on her career progression and family plans and respondent C found this to "*definitely a big benefit*" Respondent D talked about her experiences with a mentor and how much it benefitted her when returning to work after having children "*having my mentor there made the return to work experience so much easier*"

Networking

As identified by Buckley et al (2011) networking can play a huge part in the career progression of not only women but men also and all but two respondent's acknowledged the importance of networking for their careers with respondent C and D saying it doesn't apply to their jobs Respondent A said that networking is very important but that she didn't have much experience with it and when asked if she felt since having children she has been eliminated from certain networking groups her answer was "*definitely*" and she also felt that because of this she maybe has missed career opportunities Respondent B felt the same She spoke about how having a child means that she has "*restricted networks because of time constraints etc , like I can't just drop everything to go to a last minute drinks thing or breakfast meeting I need to plan ahead*" This again was identified by Buckley et al (2011) who say that although women can regularly attend formal networking functions most informal networking events are done outside of the office or normal office hours in social settings and women with children find themselves not to be part of these networks due to family commitments She also agreed that opportunities because of this have "*definitely been restricted*"

Opportunities' being restricted was acknowledged in the work of Cooper Jackson (2001) who found that the difficulty faced by women in participating in informal networking activities can act as a barrier to career progression. Respondent E said that networking is important to a certain extent in her section and that yes she has definitely been eliminated from certain networking groups now she has children but not by fault of the workplace by her own fault. Respondent F agreed saying that she has definitely been eliminated from certain networking groups but has seen *"new groups opening up since having Harry, different ones, I don't really think my opportunities have been restricted no."* Respondent G said that networking was essential to her career and profession and feels that having a child has definitely eliminated her from certain networking groups but not necessarily restricted her opportunities. Respondent H disagrees. Respondent H says that the elimination from network groups *"has definitely had somewhat of an impact on opportunities."* In the industry respondent H works in she has already identified that there is a sense of *"an old boys club"* and Crowley-Henry (2011) found that one of the most stubborn obstacles women faced was the exclusion from male informal networks. Respondent I agrees, saying that due to her high power and high-pressure job she has experienced elimination and she is only back a short while and says it is only a matter of time before she is eliminated more. She also agreed that this will mean restricted opportunities but not just because of elimination from networking groups. The respondents of the investigation carried out by Cross and Linehan (2006) agreed with this, firmly believing that informality i.e. informal networking groups, in selection and promotion procedures is often at the root of gender segregation.

Suffering Careers? Can women have it all?

The last area investigated was whether or not the respondents themselves felt that their careers had suffered since having children. All answered yes. However, respondents C, E and F all said that although it has suffered it has been their own choice to let it suffer a choice that

respondent E says *"is very happy with "* Respondent F said that her career was not really that important to her, her child was more important Similarly, respondent C said that although it has suffered *"it was my own choice, I would of put of having children if I wanted my career to go further but I wanted to start my family "* Respondent B spoke of she now has to take a much longer than intended route to attain the career she wants and is not sure now after having a child *"if it is ever going to be at the level she wanted "*

Respondent D said that her career is nowhere near where it should be and this is directly because of having children Respondent G felt the same way

Respondent H says that yes her career has definitely suffered but *"that's the only thing that has suffered, my home life hasn't "* and that is a result she is *"very happy about "* Respondent I feels the same, she said that since having her child she has been *"put into a holding pattern until I go again meaning missing out on big accounts possibly"* but that it was well worth the suffered career for her child

Conclusions and Recommendations

Key Findings

The most important finding of this research is that yes women do indeed feel their careers have suffered since having children Unanimously the respondents of this research agreed that since having children their careers have been affected in some way The way in which the respondent's careers have been affected did differ but they were united in saying that their careers have been affected and ultimately suffered However, although their careers have been affected, all women said that having their children in their lives made it all worthwhile

The notion of the protean career addressed in the literature review applied very much to the lives and careers of the respondents of this research as all women agreed that since having children their priorities had changed which is the basis of the protean career

The main issue that emerged as facing the women of this research on their return to work after having children was people's perceptions of them and how they perceived people to see them The respondents of this study do feel that since having children they are perceived differently by their organisations and co-workers

Interestingly, most respondents did not feel like they were met by any organisational barriers coming back to work after having children

In regard to work-life balance all women said they have reached a balance that they are happy with but could always be improved

Looking at how far women have come in the last 150 years in regard to equality to their male counterparts, it is surprising to see that still today in 2012 women are still the ones who take on the majority of the child rearing responsibilities and still the ones who have to let their careers take the back seat

The structure and culture of an organisation plays a big part in the return to work experience for women and all respondents agreed that having some sort of female mentor would benefit them drastically All respondents also agreed that having children has eliminated them from certain networking groups which may hinder future opportunities

To conclude, all respondents said that yes, their careers had suffered since having children

Recommendations

Looking at the findings of this research the researcher recommends three things

Firstly, in order to battle the issue of perceptions and how working mothers are perceived the researcher recommends the culture of the organisation be addressed very seriously Organisations should try and create and foster a culture that supports and encourages working mothers and changes people's views on working mothers This will lead to a better unity within an organisation and will mean that women would not be as reserved in availing of family friendly policies and procedures or flexible working arrangements as they will not be afraid of how they will be perceived Like respondent I said, using women who are in high power positions to lead as an example will help a more open culture trickle down through the lower levels of the organisation This could also be helped by the introduction of a mentoring programme within the organisation to help working mother s will balancing home life and work life and possibly giving them more of a push to possibly pursue promotions etc

The second recommendation would be to maybe look at the networking groups within the organisation and look to make the informal groups more accessible to working mothers and less exclusive Or possibly construct new networks for working mothers in which they can partake if it is not possible to rearrange some of the informal networks from which they might be excluded

The last recommendation would be for organisations to look at ways of possibly encouraging working mothers to stay at senior levels within organisations so that there is a gender balance at the top Having a gender balance at senior levels in organisations can be very beneficial to an organisation for decision making reasons, competitive advantage reasons and productivity reasons

Limitations

A number of limitations were met during this research investigation Firstly the time frame in which the research was conducted This research was required for the fulfilment of the researcher's master's degree which spanned from September 2011 to 31st August 2012 Having a due date of August 31st meant that the researcher had a limitation on how long could be spent doing it

Another limitation was the sample size used Once again because the research had a due date of August 31st the researcher had to be realistic as to the sample of respondents used Due to the deadline the researcher had to choose a small respondent group to ensure the research was carried out sufficiently and thoroughly and to ensure that the researcher had enough time to conduct it

Another limitation was the fact that this research was limited to women in Ireland and was not an international study Again, due to time constraints, the researcher had to be realistic as to what could be achieved Therefore the researcher chose to focus the study in Ireland and choose a small sample to work with

Future Research Direction

In the future there would be a lot of aspects the researcher would like to explore in relation to this study For example, the researcher would like to look at the notion of a matched sample This would involve interviewing not only the working mothers but also their managers or/and

employers and see their perspective on the situation This could allow the researcher to identify if the perceptions these women believe others have of them are true It could also give management an insight into the minds of working mothers and see how they could support their employees and get the most out of them

In a future study the researcher would also like to look at this phenomenon on an international level This study was confined to Ireland only and it would be interesting to see if the same answers would emerge on an international level or if some nationalities would be similar and others different This would lead on to look at this on a cultural level also and see how and if it would differ between different cultures

Personal Learning Statement

After conducting this research the researcher has learned a lot of valuable things For instance, the researcher now knows how to conduct a literature review effectively and efficiently The researcher also knows the importance of understanding the components of research methodologies and how, for example, your research philosophy can impact the way in which you conduct your research The researcher also learned a lot about time management and setting goals for themselves and in future, would plan their time more wisely and set mini goals and deadlines to help stay on track However, the researcher feels that they have learned a lot from this experience and is keen to undertake the next research challenge

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Appendices

Appendix 1- The research onion
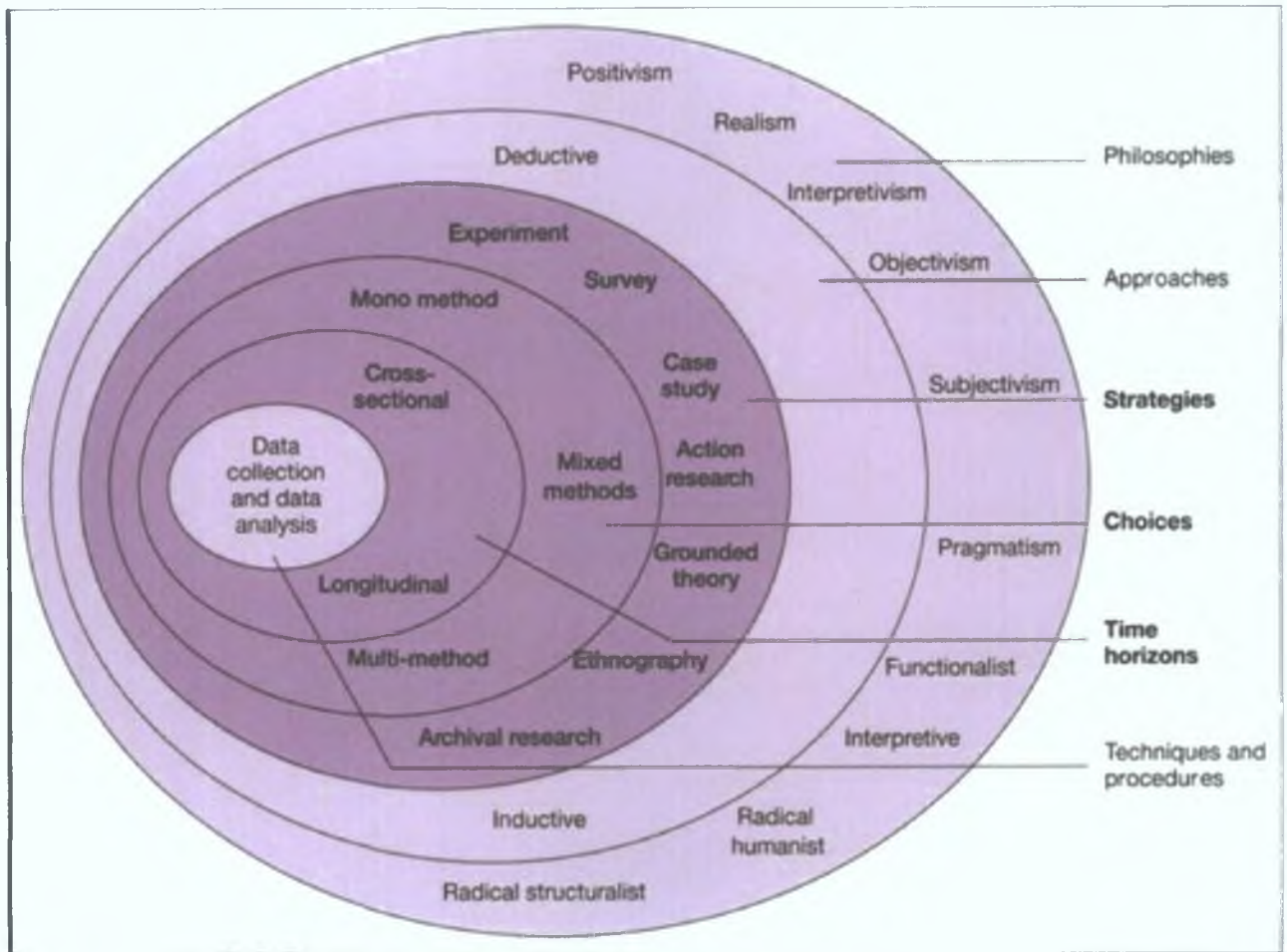
Questions for Interviewees

1 How many children do you have?

2 How old are you now?

3 How old were you when you had your children?

4 Do you feel having children has affected your career? If so how? Do you think this has been your own choice?

5 What type of childcare do you use?

6 Do you think a good childcare system is an important factor in allowing you to go back to work? Why?

7 Does your company offer childcare?

8 If your company did do you think you would have availed of it? If no why not?

9 What did you find were the issues that you encountered returning to work after maternity leave?

10 Do you feel you faced barriers when you returned to work after having a baby? If so what do you feel they were?

11 Would you return to work early from maternity leave if your company asked you to? Do you feel your commitment would be questioned if you didn't?

12 Did you / do you have a mentor in relation to your career? Do you think having one would be of benefit?

13 Would you consider networking to be important for your career? Have you experiences with networking? What impact do you feel the networking experiences have had on your career?

14 Do you feel since having a child you have been eliminated from certain networking groups systems? Do you feel the opportunities are restricted? Why?

15 What are your thoughts on work life balance? Do you think you have achieved a good work life balance that you are happy with? What else do you think you could do to improve your work life balance?

16 Do you feel work life balance and family friendly policies in organisations are of any actual benefit?

17 Is your section mainly men or women or a mixture of both? Do you feel this has affected your return to work experience?

18 Does your company offer flexible working arrangements? If they did or do, do you or would you avail of them? Why or why not? Do you feel your commitment again would be questioned?

19 Has your partner availed of paternity leave? Do you think that it is you who has taken on the majority of the child raising responsibilities and because of this your career has been affected?

20 Is your company child friendly?

21 Would you consider a career break? Why or why not? When?

22 Do you feel guilt in missing out on your children's growing up has resulted in restricted career advancement?

23 Do you think your career has suffered since having a child?