

‘WHAT ENABLES PROFESSIONAL WOMEN TO CONTINUE TO PURSUE
THEIR CAREERS FULL-TIME AND BRING UP CHILDREN?’

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by

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Abstract

Title: 'What enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children?'

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Women who continue to pursue their careers full-time once they become mothers face a constant juggling act of priorities. Some women succeed but many well qualified and experienced mothers have 'fallen by the wayside' and have had to work at a level lower than their qualifications warrant, often in part-time positions. This is an unacceptable situation, squandering skills and talents that the United Kingdom and individuals personally have invested in.

Whilst there is no shortage of literature on working mothers, most of it focuses on work-life balance and combining part-time employment with caring for children. This research focuses on full-time working mothers and asks what actually **enables** women to continue to pursue their careers and bring up children.

The results of one to one interviews with 29 women, who are both pursuing a full-time career and bringing up children, form the basis of the research. The findings conclude that there is not one specific factor which can be pinpointed that enables a woman to work full-time and bring up children, rather a combination of interacting factors mainly support from a partner, the ability to work flexibly and having sound childcare arrangements in place. The findings highlight the role of househusbands in enabling mothers to be the family breadwinners. The findings suggest that a woman has to be realistic about what she can achieve and be prepared to compromise, recognising that 'having it all' is not always a possibility. Being able to accept one's limitations and being prepared to identify where priorities lie, enable women to navigate conflicting demands in different areas of their lives, which make it possible to juggle and balance both a full-time career and bringing up children.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Every new obligation carries with it the danger of creating disequilibrium in an already tenuous balance between mothering and the demands of the paid workplace.

(Schultheiss, 2009:28)

This thesis investigates 'What enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children?' It aims to identify and understand the variable factors that women who work-full time, and bring up children, contend with on a daily basis and what needs to be in place for a full-time working mother to do both roles effectively.

Whilst the research title itself is self-explanatory, there is a need to explain what is meant by 'full-time' and 'professional'. A woman working full-time is one who is contracted to work 37 hours or more on a weekly basis. The definition of 'professional', for the purpose of this research, has been broadened from the traditionally considered professional fields, such as working as a doctor, teacher or lawyer. The research is concerned with women pursuing 'professional' or 'managerial' careers, these women will be working in a professional, managerial or senior capacity, and will have a minimum of a degree level qualification, or a work-based qualifications at or above Level 3 in the National Qualifications Framework.

For this research an interpretivist paradigm was identified as being the most appropriate approach, as the aim of the research was to undertake a detailed investigation into the experience of working mothers. It was considered that a qualitative methodology, using an interpretivist approach, would be the most effective method of gaining an understanding of what enables women to continue to pursue a career full-time and bring up children. 29 women who met the criteria participated in a semi-structured one to one interview, the results of which form the basis of the research.

This chapter identifies the need for this piece of research. Initially justification for and the reasons why this piece of research has been carried out, including an introduction to the researcher's background and interests are discussed. The chapter then goes on to give some detailed background information about current labour market participation of working mothers in the United Kingdom, together with information about the impact of Government policy on the labour market participation of women. Secondly, the research question and the specific research objectives are outlined. Thirdly, the significance of the study and its contribution to knowledge is highlighted. Finally the structure of the thesis is outlined.

Why carry out this research?

The press and media never seem to tire of the subject of working mothers and women who choose to work, particularly full-time, when their children are young often face criticism. The desirability and feasibility of combining work, let alone a career, with motherhood, especially when children are very young, is a high

profile discussion topic both by government and influential agencies. Mothers often come under criticism for wanting to work and are expected, by some, to be satisfied with staying at home with their children and be less ambitious with regards to career success. Some writers claim of the 'dangers' to children when mothers choose to work (Bowlby, 1955; Bowlby, 2007; Carvel 2001). Other writers suggest that a mother is less committed to the workplace and 'may be less able (than a childless colleague) to meet the demands of their employing organisation'. (Burke 1999:162). Whatever one's views are on mothers who work when their children are young, it would be difficult for anyone to dispute the challenge that mothers who pursue a full-time career whilst bringing up their children face.

It is argued by some that far too many women move to part-time work or leave the labour market altogether following motherhood (Thair and Ridson, 1999). Whilst evidence suggests that during the past decade there has been an increase in women participating in the labour market, from 67.7 per cent in 1998 to 70 per cent in 2006, the recent Equality and Human Rights Commission Report, Sex and Power (2008:13) paints a less positive picture about both the participation of mothers in full-time employment and the level they are working at. It states that:

'before the arrival of children, 85 per cent of working women are full-time. That falls to just 34 per cent of working mothers with pre-school children. A 2004 survey of part-time workers showed that just over half had had

previous jobs in which they used higher qualifications or skills or had more management / supervisory responsibility’.

In addition, it has been argued that women are often restricted to part-time employment by the need to combine employment with their childcare activities (Connolly and Gregory, 2008). If women, upon their return to work following motherhood, experience unsupportive working practices, an expectation of long and inflexible working hours and the challenge of finding accessible and affordable high quality childcare, it is not surprising that working full-time poses such a challenge. It is little wonder that the solution for many women is to take a less challenging role or leave employment altogether.

Hakim (1996) however argues that this is not the case. Quantitative evidence supports Hakim’s argument that the majority of women who work part-time choose to do so. A report by the Department of Trade and Industry (2003) suggests that in the United Kingdom, according to survey data in 2000, almost 73 per cent of women working part-time said that they did not want a full-time job. This research will explore Hakim’s argument in detail throughout the chapters and findings from the study provide a challenge to Hakim’s preference theory.

Whilst there is no shortage of literature on working women, particularly around the area of work-life balance and the combination of part-time employment with looking after children and domestic responsibilities, there is no specific research into what actually **enables** women to continue to pursue their careers and bring up children. This research aims to provide a comprehensive answer to the

question which will be useful for the government and policy makers, employers and most of all women themselves. If the literature is accurate, many educated, well qualified and experienced mothers have 'fallen by the wayside' and have had to work at a level lower than their qualifications warrant and often in part-time positions. This is an unacceptable situation, squandering skills and talents that the United Kingdom and individuals personally have invested in. It is hoped that by asking this specific research question, there will be a greater insight into how women can continue to contribute effectively to the economy, as well as bring up their children.

The Thesis in Context – Background of the Researcher

In order to inform the reader and set the context of my interest in this area of research, I will now give a brief overview of my background.

I am a 39 year old mother, working full-time as a Team Manager for a local authority. I am married with two children aged six and eight. I have worked full-time in managerial positions throughout the life of my children. I graduated from Sheffield Hallam University in 1993 with a 2:1 BSc (Hons) in Food Marketing Management and secured a place on Unigate's Graduate Management Trainee Programme. In 1995 I went to the University of Greenwich to study for a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (post-compulsory) and following a year's study I was successful in securing a lecturing position at Lambeth College in London. Whilst at Lambeth College I embarked upon a part-time MA in Education Management.

I moved from London in 1998 and lectured in Business Studies at Rutland College for two years. During this time, I had to put my MA on hold, due to it being a taught course only. Building on my MA, I was interested in progressing my career to a management level and was successful in being appointed to a new position 'Lifelong Learning Manager' for Peterborough City Council. I found the move from working with sixth formers to adult returners interesting and was involved in supporting those who had missed out on a traditional education to return to study. I managed to negotiate the completion of my MA through distance learning and my thesis was entitled 'A Case-study investigation into the low levels of participation of unemployed men in basic education outreach provision in Peterborough'.

In 2001 I had my first child and experienced the trials and tribulations of working full-time and being a mother. At this point, I was in a fortunate position, there was a nursery on site at work and my husband's circumstances meant he could be flexible around childcare.

My experience in supporting those who had missed out on a traditional education had led me to become more interested in the socio-economic issues facing families and the barriers that many of them experienced in bringing up families in challenging circumstances. In 2002 I applied for, and was successful in gaining, the position of 'Sure Start Manager' for Peterborough City Council. I enjoyed this job tremendously and was extremely fortunate to be supported by an excellent manager to gain managerial skills and experience which would stand me in good stead for future promotion. It was at this time that I was accepted onto the Distance Learning Doctorate in Social Sciences at the

University of Leicester. My employer had kindly agreed to sponsor me for this study and was supportive in giving me access to study leave. At this point in time, I was interested in evaluating the success of the Government's strategies to lift children out of poverty, as the area of research for my thesis.

Having started a new job, my life became more complicated. I had to move my son to a different nursery and my husband was promoted at work, which left him with little flexibility to provide support with childcare and in 2004, I had my second child. I was beginning to experience the pressures of combining a full-time career with motherhood. In 2005, we moved house and my husband changed jobs. I was faced with a decision of having to travel a 70 mile round trip to work on a daily basis or look for alternative employment. I applied for, and was successful in gaining, the position of 'Director of Yes' which involved heading up a large department of a Further Education College, delivering work-based learning and provision for adult returners. My experience of being a full-time working mother changed overnight. I experienced a totally different organisational culture with no flexibility, rigid hours and unsupportive management. It was at this time, that I had to put my studies 'on-hold' as I was struggling desperately to manage working full-time and bringing up my children and I could not fit any study into my life. I was very unhappy.

I stayed at the Further Education College for only 5 months; it was one of the most challenging periods of my life. This was when it struck me how fortunate I had been working for a supportive family friendly employer and how challenging it was to work and bring up children without the flexibility being there. It was at this time, I was able to pick up my studies again and my thesis proposal began

to take shape, based on my own experience, 'What enables women to pursue a career full-time and bring up children?'

For the first time in my life I was now working part-time, three days a week as a Children's Centre Development Manager for Lincolnshire County Council and the other two days I was looking after the children and trying to study! I only worked part-time for a year. I discovered that it was impossible to look after children and study simultaneously, we had committed ourselves to a large mortgage and working part-time wasn't really paying the bills. However, the main reason I went back to working full-time was that the job I was doing wasn't challenging enough; I was bored and found that the only challenging job opportunities advertised were full-time positions.

In 2006, I secured a full-time position of 'Strategic Development Officer' for Lincolnshire County Council and have, since then, had several promotions to the position I am currently in. Whilst I find being a full-time working mother challenging, I have little time for myself and have struggled desperately to complete this Doctorate, I realise I am fortunate in many ways. I work for a family friendly employer which enables me to have flexibility if needed. I have a supportive husband who has flexibility in his working hours and I live close to my family, who take care of my children after school.

Background Information - Labour Market Participation of Women

By providing some background information on the labour market participation of women and government policies in this area, it is hoped to set the context for the study and its findings.

The labour market has seen increased participation of women during the last century (Dex 1984, 1987, 2003). It is worth noting, at this stage, that it has not been possible to identify existing literature which accurately ascertains the number of women working full time in managerial or professional careers and bringing up young children. However, evidence suggests that in recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of women who are pursuing managerial and professional careers (Davidson and Cooper, 1992) and also that the number of women with young children who are continuing their paid employment following motherhood has 'dramatically increased' (Thair and Rison, 1999).

Thair and Ridson (1999) suggest that increasingly, well qualified women with careers are combining motherhood with paid work. They suggest mothers with careers who are married or co-habiting with at least one pre-school child as contributing significantly to this trend. Data confirms these views and identifies a significant increase in employment rates (both part-time and full-time) of women with pre-school children, from 27 per cent in 1983 to 56 per cent in 2004 (Labour Force Survey Household Datasets ONS.Labour Market Trends, July 2005).

One of the explanations for their greater involvement in the labour market is that more women delay having children until their thirties and then are more likely to return to work afterwards. This is because women who have put having children 'on hold' are more likely to be better educated and to be working in higher level occupations than those who haven't. Therefore, they are more likely to have enough income to pay for childcare, will be better placed to take advantage of flexible working opportunities and possibly be more motivated to remain in employment (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Gatrell, 2005).

Macran et al. (1996:290- 291) suggest that:

'The secret of success is being highly educated, delaying the birth of the first child, taking maternity leave, returning to full-time work before having any more children and paying for childcare'.

Walling (2005:280) provides statistics on employment rates of people with dependent children between 1994 – 2004. Table 1.1 is an extract from her work and shows the full time and part time employment rates for people with dependent children in the United Kingdom, Spring Quarters 1994 to 2004. The table identifies that between 1994 and 2004 the employment rate for all parents increased and the upward trend reflects an increase in both full-time and part-time employment. 'However the most significant increases were the increase in the number of couple mothers working full time (4 per cent) and the numbers of

lone parents working both full-time (7 per cent) and part-time (5 per cent)'.
(Walling 2005:280)

Table 1.1. Employment rates of People with Dependent Children 1994 - 2004

Year	Married/ Co-habiting Mothers			Married/Co-habiting Fathers			Lone parents (per cent) (Mothers & Fathers)		
	Full Time	Part-Time	Total	Full Time	Part-Time	Total	Full Time	Part-Time	Total
1994	24	40	64	84	2	86	21	21	42
1995	25	41	66	85	2	87	21	21	42
1996	25	42	67	85	3	87	22	22	44
1997	26	42	68	86	3	88	22	23	45
1998	27	42	69	86	3	89	22	24	46
1999	27	43	70	87	3	90	23	25	48
2000	28	42	71	87	3	90	25	26	51
2001	28	43	71	87	3	90	26	26	51
2002	28	43	71	86	3	90	26	27	53
2003	28	43	71	87	4	91	26	27	53
2004	28	42	71	87	4	91	28	26	54

Source: Labour Force Survey Household Datasets (ONS.Labour Market Trends. July2005)

The impact of Government policy on the labour market participation of women.

In order to clarify and understand the changing pattern of female employment during the last century, an overview of the background to social and economic policy decision making in the United Kingdom will be outlined briefly.

The male breadwinner model has underpinned Government policy since the end of the Second World War and has been based on the premise that married women don't work and that male wages are enough to financially support a family. Creighton (1999:519) points out that 'from the mid-nineteenth century, the male breadwinner family became increasingly central to the organisation of social and economic life in Britain'. The male breadwinner family model was supported by the post Second World War government's message, based on Bowlby's (1955) contentious views, he argued that the care of the child by its mother for the first three years of its life was critical to its future wellbeing and mental health.

However, during World War Two, the male breadwinner model was temporarily disregarded due to the need to recruit female labour. In turn, government provided childcare was put in place to meet the need of working women.

O'Connor (2006:35) comments that following the end of the war the government failed to acknowledge a continuing need for childcare provision and cites Gregson and Lowe (1995) who state that the government promoted a

message regarding the 'dangers of collective childcare provision' and reconstituted childcare as a 'home-based, full-time, private and female concern'. In the 1980's and 1990's the Conservative Governments in the UK prioritised the preservation of the traditional family unit and were therefore accepted reduced labour market participation by women in order to maintain the male breadwinner family model (Bottomley 1994). During the last century, with the exception of the period of World War Two, government policy, rhetoric and decision making has promoted the male breadwinner model and the message that a mother's primary role is to bring up her children.

In 1998 the New Labour Government announced that it had adopted a policy of 'welfare-to-work'. Dean (2001:32) explains,

'the premise being that paid employment is the best route out of poverty and thereby the best form of welfare. The approach recognised the increasing diversity of family forms and was committed to enabling parents in general and mothers in particular to combine paid employment and family life'.

In the same year, Tony Blair launched The National Childcare Strategy with the aim of reducing child poverty and raising outcomes of the most disadvantaged children, to bring them in line with their peers. A number of initiatives were introduced to kick start this strategy. The Working Families Tax Credit, a means tested in-work benefit aimed at 'low to middle income families, with extra help

for childcare called the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit' was introduced. (www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/taxcredits)

In addition, free part-time early years education for 3 and 4 year olds was made available. Whilst aimed at those families who were unable to access this provision due to financial pressures, it was offered universally which has also had a significant positive financial impact on parents already paying for their childcare. The Government's attempts to promote family friendly employment have resulted in tax and National Insurance exemptions for employees using registered childcare, if their employer runs a Childcare Voucher Scheme. Subscribing to this scheme 'can save employees up to £1,196 per parent a year'. (<http://www.childcarevouchers.co.uk>)

Other legislation which the Labour government introduced to support both employers and employees to help balance work and family life includes: The Work and Families Act 2006; The Flexible Working Law 2009 and The Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000. Although adherence by employers to government legislation is mandatory, it is recognised that the culture, ethos and attitudes of a workplace and its staff will determine the acceptability of accessing these entitlements, as will an individual's personal, particularly financial circumstances. The ability of women to take advantage of these changes in legislation will be explored during the interviews and the impact of their effectiveness in enabling women to work full-time will be assessed. Literature identifying and reviewing the impact of Labour's policy changes is lacking, however over ten years on from the introduction of the National Childcare Strategy, one would expect to be able to

notice an impact and evaluate its effectiveness on enabling families, particularly women, to combine parenting and a career.

Research Question and Objectives

The primary purpose of this thesis is to explore the question:

‘What enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children?’

In order to fully answer this question, the specific research objectives are:

1. To gather the necessary background information from women in order to establish, to what extent personal circumstances impact upon women’s ability to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children.
2. To identify specific ‘enablers’ or enabling factors which enable women to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children.
3. To determine patterns in strategies women have to enable them to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children.

The significance of the study and its contribution to knowledge

This study set out to determine ‘What enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children?’

Whilst there is much literature on various elements of what one may think enables women to pursue full-time careers and bring up children, such as the significance of childcare, flexible working, supportive employers, this study does not presume that these are the enabling factors, it gives a number of women the opportunity to share their experiences of what works for them and how they cope with juggling the demands of a pressurised job and bringing up a family.

The research is unique and therefore of value as the findings:

1. Provide a sound challenge to Hakim's preference theory, regarding the concept of preference and choice and categorisation of women.
2. Identify the variables which enable a woman to pursue a career full-time and bring up children.
3. Propose the concept that women constantly navigate and prioritise conflicting demands to enable them to cope with working full time and bringing up their children.

The format of the thesis

The thesis is organised into six chapters. The initial chapter identifies the need and justifies the reasons for carrying out this research. It gives an overview of the labour market participation of working mothers in the United Kingdom. It

outlines the research question and research objectives and the overall structure of the thesis.

Chapter two contains a critical review of the literature pertinent to this study, based on the research question. The literature review is structured into three sections. The first section considers elements of a woman's life that, if in place, may be critical in supporting a woman to pursue a full-time career and bring up children. The second section considers literature which explores the significance of educational attainment and qualifications in enabling a woman to pursue a full-time career and bring up children. It considers Hakim's preference theory and discusses to what extent preference is dominant in an educated mother's decision making regarding her career. The third section of the chapter focuses on women's career paths and directions, including an examination of the concept of glass ceilings and an exploration of the debate around structure and agency, in relation to women's career progression.

Chapter three describes the methodology used in the thesis and justifies the reason for the chosen method. The chapter is structured around Kvale's (1996:88) model of seven stages of an interview investigation and concludes by looking at the limitations of the research conducted.

Chapter four is the first of the chapters which discusses the findings from the research; it starts by considering the evidence which contributes towards the first key finding - the dependence on the woman's earnings as the primary source of income in the family. The emergence of the second key finding - the prevalence of house husbands who act as an enabling factor for mothers to return to work full-time, is a key focus for discussion.

Chapter five considers the third key finding which has emerged from this research, and will put forward the argument that the women who participated in this research constantly prioritise and navigate conflicting demands, which enables them to cope with working full time and bringing up their children.

Chapter six presents conclusions, implications and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2 A review of the literature on working mothers

Introduction

In order to inform the research and ascertain the current picture in relation to mothers in full-time employment, a review of the literature necessitated considering information on the historical perspective of the labour market participation of women and government policies which may have influenced activity. This information has been located in the introductory chapter. In addition, in this chapter, reference is frequently made to statistical information which helps build an accurate picture of full-time working mothers in the United Kingdom today. Whilst it is recognised that it is not usual to contain such quantities of information in a literature review, I believe that without this information, I could not justify some of the assertions being made. Whilst I have tried to keep this type of information to a minimum, I feel it makes a key contribution to this piece of work and is therefore justifiably situated in this chapter.

In order to structure discussion about the literature, this chapter has been divided into a number of sections. The first section of this chapter considers elements of a woman's life which may enable her to pursue a full-time career and bring up her children. These are areas that are personal to an individual's circumstances, including financial circumstances, the make-up of the family unit and the difference a partner can make. The chapter then considers elements

that, if in place, may be critical in supporting a woman including childcare, support networks and help with domestic responsibilities.

The second section considers literature which explores the significance of educational attainment and qualifications in enabling a woman to pursue a full-time career and bring up children. It considers Hakim's preference theory and discusses to what extent preference dominates an educated mother's decision making regarding her career.

The third section of the chapter focuses on women's career paths and directions, including an examination of the concept of glass ceilings and an exploration of the debate around structure and agency in relation to women's career progression. This section examines literature around the impact an organisation can have on a woman's ability to pursue a career full-time and bring up children. It also examines women's career pathways, focusing on the pursuit of horizontal or lateral career pathways and the extent to which they enable women to work full-time and bring up children. This leads into a discussion around the concept of work-life balance, examining work-life balance literature and commenting on its pertinence to mothers who work full-time.

The chapter concludes by summarising the key issues identified in the literature review and relating them to the research in question.

The Impact of Personal Circumstances

This section examines some of the key personal factors that may impact on a mother's ability to pursue a full-time career. Crompton and Harris (1998) argue that the personal circumstances of a woman may have an impact on her ability to pursue a full-time career following parenthood. A review of literature has shown that the following aspects may be influential in determining a woman's ability to manage a full-time career and a family: her financial situation (Burgess et al, 2002; Hudson et al., 2004; Crompton and Geran, 1995); the make up of her family unit (Barnes, Willitts et al, 2004; Walling, 2005); her partner (Kiernan, 1992) and the extent of her domestic responsibilities. The extent to which these elements may impact upon a woman's ability to succeed in balancing both a family life and a career are considered below.

The literature showed that the influence of financial factors are key in a woman's decision making regarding her employment status following motherhood. (Burgess et al, 2002; Hudson et al., 2004; Crompton and Geran, 1995) For some women, returning to work full time is a choice and for others, due to financial circumstances, it may be the only option. The importance of financial implications is highlighted in research by Hudson et al (2004:77) which indicates that 'in 2002, 72 per cent of mothers did not take their full maternity leave entitlement due to financial reasons'.

Even if women are in a financial position to benefit from their full maternity leave, it would appear that taking a brief break from the workplace has the potential to impact upon both earning ability and career success. A recent study showed that women who return to work following a year's maternity leave

earn on average 16.1 per cent less than their employment prior to maternity leave. (Walby and Olsen, 2002).

Any reference made to gender inequalities in relation to either the workplace or domestic division of labour should be made with reference to the concept of patriarchy. Patriarchy is a form of social organisation in which the male is viewed as the head of the family, holding authority over his subordinate wife and any children in the family. Whilst several hundred years ago patriarchy meant that women lacked a legal or political identity in society, now feminist claims for equality are generally accepted in our society as reasonable principles.

However, Walby (1990) identifies six key patriarchal structures which continue to restrict women and support male domination. Amongst these are patriarchy operating through the workplace, resulting in horizontal and vertical segregation and thereby women receiving lower rates of pay than their male colleagues. Another key structure through which Walby believes patriarchy continues to exist, is the gendered division of household labour, where women are often expected to take primary responsibility for the housework and childcare, in addition to working full-time.

In her later work Walby (1997) argues that patriarchy has altered in several respects and that young women, without children, have benefitted more than other women by the progress made in society. She points out that younger women, on average, have better educational qualifications and are less likely to

accept gender discrimination at work. However, she does comment that once women become mothers, their career opportunities are likely to be restricted.

The introduction evidenced that labour market participation patterns of women have changed a great deal, and the breadwinning role is now shared in many families. It is worth recognising that women who work in some professional or managerial fields, may have a decision to make regarding short-term gains and long term rewards. Women pursuing professional careers are likely to be working within an organisational culture and structure consisting of vertical career pathways and correlating remuneration. The impact of temporarily leaving or interrupting, this vertical career pathway, relatively early on in a career could have a huge impact on future earning potential. (McNabb and Wass, 2006)

The impact of taking maternity leave appears to be most felt in professional areas of employment. McNabb and Wass (2006:289) in their study of pay and promotion among women examine the 'work place sources of sex-based and gendered pay differentials in professional labour markets'. Their findings reveal that female solicitors receive on average only 58 per cent of the earnings received by male solicitors. They report that women have fewer prospects of promotion, and receive lower rewards than men for both promotion and experience. As McNabb and Wass point out, 'having achieved equality in entry, women are not achieving equality in terms of pay and promotion' (2006:304). Their findings reveal that 'differential rates of promotion are an important source of the earnings gap and that the process of promotion is sex-segregated by a combination of patronage and long hours culture' (2006:304). This is consistent

with much of the literature on professional labour markets (Crompton and Sanderson, 1990; Hakim, 1996).

McNabb and Wass (2006:304) cite Crompton and Sanderson (1990) who put forward a 'hypothesis of inequality based on sex in professional labour markets'. The findings also support Hakim's (1996) proposition that women in professional roles are often treated as secondary workers, where male expectations of women are that they are not as committed to their careers due to having family, household and domestic responsibilities. Wass and McNabb (2006: 304) commenting on the field of law state that,

'employment as a solicitor, like that of other professionals divides along sex lines. Men and women participate in different ways and that attracts different rewards. Men work longer hours than women, and most of the difference in hours is taken up with non-chargeable work. Interview data show the selective availability of non-chargeable work and its importance in promotion. Competing domestic demands make long hours more costly for mothers, particularly those hours over and above the normal working week. The biology of child bearing and the unequal division of labour at home, generates differences in preferences and circumstances such that women solicitors who are mothers choose to work fewer hours (over and above their normal working day) and specialise in less intensive areas of the law'.

If a mother is the sole or primary earner in the family it is probably more likely that she will return to work full-time having had children, due to financial necessity. Hakim (1997:65-66) distinguishes between primary earners and secondary earners.

‘Primary earners must necessarily obtain a regular income to cover basic necessities; they will normally therefore work full-time and continuously. Secondary earners are not earning a living; they are financially dependent on another person, or on state income support for the basic necessities of life such as housing, food and fuel. Earnings from employment are thus supplementary or secondary to this other, larger source of income.’

In addition to the primary / secondary earner model there is now, in many households in the United Kingdom, a ‘dual breadwinner model’, where both incomes are essential to maintain a standard of living or commitments that a couple have (Warren 2007). In this model, particularly where the female has a substantial income, the couple will face decisions surrounding life choices when they become parents. Large mortgages and financial commitments that are easily met when both partners work full-time, potentially necessitate both partners to continue working full-time once children arrive. Starting a family may mean a couple faces ‘downsizing’ unless they both continue to bring in the pre-child salary. Mothers may be faced with no option apart from continuing to work full-time in order to make ends meet to maintain, what could be viewed as, a materialistically enviable lifestyle.

It would appear that financial circumstances and consideration to financial implications are key in determining, not the ability to work full-time, but decisions around returning to work full-time following motherhood.

The make up of the family unit

The make up of the family unit, which in this context, means the number of children, their ages and the age differences between them, may have an impact on a woman's ability to pursue a full-time career and bring up children.

Walling (2005:280) identifies the significance of the make up of the family unit on levels of employment and suggests that,

‘Employment rates amongst couple mothers and lone parents vary according to personal characteristics and family characteristics, such as the number and ages of children within the family’.

The results from the Office for National Statistics (2004) Labour Force Survey support this finding and show that the likelihood of mothers who had less than three children being in employment, particularly full-time, was much greater than those who had three or more children. Table 2.1 is an extract from a table from Walling (2005:281). It shows that,

‘In 2004 only 56 per cent of couple mothers with three or more children were in employment and only 18 per cent were working full-time. For lone parents with three or more children the overall and full-time

employment rates were lower still at 36 per cent and 14 per cent respectively.'

Table 2.1 also shows that the age of the children has a major effect on employment rates and status. Walling (2005:280) suggests that

'Couple mothers and lone parents with children of pre-school age were much less likely to be in employment than those whose youngest child was of school age. They were also less likely to be working full-time.....In 2004, the overall employment rate for couple mothers with children under 5 years old was 59 per cent. For lone parents with children under 5 years old the employment rate was lower still, at 34 per cent. The full time employment rates for couple mothers and lone parents with children under 5 years old were 21 per cent and 13 per cent respectively.'

Table 2.1 The employment rates of parents both by number of dependent children and age of youngest child in The United Kingdom, Spring 2004

	Age of youngest dependent child				Number of dependent children		
	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-18	1	2	3+
Employment Rate (per cent)							
Married / cohabiting mothers	59	77	80	81	75	73	56
Married / cohabiting Fathers	91	91	91	88	90	93	87
Lone Parents	34	57	65	74	59	53	36
Full Time Employment Rate (per cent)							
Married / cohabiting mothers	21	27	38	43	37	25	18
Married / cohabiting Fathers	87	88	87	85	86	90	82
Lone Parents	13	24	39	57	34	24	14

Source: Labour Force Survey Household Datasets an Extract from a table originally published in (ONS.Labour Market Trends.July 2005)

With employment rates, including full-time employment, increasing as children reach school age it would be a reasonable assumption to make that mothers find it easier to combine motherhood of school age children with pursuing a full-time career. Moor et al (2007:584) conducted research in the United States to identify whether demands on mothers in managerial careers decreased in terms of household and family pressures when children reach school age. The study found that,

‘Managerial women showed an increase in the degree to which they intentionally focused on work over family issues when children entered school. This would indicate that a child’s entry to full-time school somehow signals the beginning of fewer home-related responsibilities and that women may now return to relatively greater emphasis on their careers without incurring too much of a burden.’

However, Barnett and Gareis (2006) in their study of work and family conflict suggest that this is not the case and the combination of working full-time and bringing up school age children placed considerable strain on families, particularly in terms of putting satisfactory childcare arrangements in place.

This evidence raises questions regarding conscious decisions a professional woman makes in terms of planning a family, both with regards to the number of children and the length of time between having children. This will be explored through my research. It would appear that the more children a woman has, the likelihood of her working full-time decreases. To what extent are women making

conscious decisions about the number of children they have, in order for them to be able to pursue their careers full-time?

The impact of a partner

Whilst this research is based solely on women's experiences, it is worth noting that women do not exist in isolation, particularly those who have children. The presence of a partner in a relationship and their attitudes, values, availability and willingness to support both in terms of childcare and other domestic tasks, may have a significant impact in enabling a mother to work full-time.

Gattrell (2005) identifies heterosexual women who are cohabiting or married as the most likely to continue their career after childbirth. Evidence presented earlier, has demonstrated that lone parents are much less likely to be employed full-time, even those educated to degree level or above. It is therefore justifiable to surmise that the presence or absence of a supportive partner may be seen as a critical factor impacting upon women's ability to continue pursuing their careers. If this is the case, what exactly do men need to be able to do to support their partners in pursuing their career following parenthood?

Research shows that the attitude of her partner will have an impact on a woman's decision making around returning to work following motherhood. Debacker (2008:542) identified that the attitude and role of a partner is influential in decision making regarding the woman's return to work and the childcare arrangements put in place. She states,

‘despite often being disregarded in research, a partner’s characteristics are important in the work-care behaviour of mothers. Having a partner with traditional views often restrains mothers from choosing a full-time work / formal childcare arrangement’.

The attitude of a partner towards gendered division of labour may have a significant impact on how a woman feels about continuing to pursue a career full-time following motherhood. Despite the decline of the male breadwinning model, many families still believe in following this traditional pathway. If, for whatever reason, this ideology is not achievable there can be a significant impact upon the identity of family members. (Warren 2007; Creighton, 1999; Pfau-Effinger, 2004) If a woman is pursuing a full-time career without the support of a partner, even if it is to financially support the family, his negative attitude will present additional demands on the woman in terms of both emotional stress and a double workload.

Another reason for a partner’s negative attitude towards a woman pursuing a full time career could be the lack of time it leaves her to ‘support’ her partner. Gatrell (2005) cites Maushart (2002) who identifies additional responsibility that a woman with a heterosexual partner may have to take on and terms it ‘wife work’. Maushart argues that wives undertake a high percentage of domestic and childcare responsibilities within a marriage because of the expectation that it is a woman’s role to support her husband’s career. Gatrell (2005:65) also cites Delphy and Leonard (1992) who suggest that,

‘Employers benefit from their (male) employees’ wives labour because they can assume that none of their workers has responsibility for the physical care of any dependents or needs to do much domestic work for themselves’.

In contrast, parents in dual earner households commonly report that childcare is equally shared. A study carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2005:3) reported that ‘66 per cent of women working full-time said the responsibilities were equally shared’. Gatrell (2005) cites Lewis (2000) who suggests that working mothers’ resentment towards partners who do not share the responsibility for childcare and the upbringing of their children increases in line with the number of hours that a woman works. This would suggest that a factor women took into consideration before returning to work full-time was their partner’s ability or willingness to share the responsibility of childcare.

Support with childcare and domestic work

Childcare and domestic work are two areas of a woman’s life that she can seek to obtain support with, often through financial arrangements. The arrangements that a woman puts in place to support her in caring for her children and running her household may be key to enabling her to continue to pursue a full-time career.

Childcare can be classified into formal childcare ie care provided from outside the family, usually for payment, and informal childcare ie care provided by family, friends or partner (O’Connor, 2006). The literature establishes that a

working woman with children will need childcare support to enable her to attend work regularly and reliably.

Wass and McNabb (2006:290) suggest that 'professional women are better placed to avoid disruption to their careers from domestic pressures, since mothers with high salaries can afford to pay for good quality childcare'.

However, Dex (2003:8) suggests that that income is not always a solution to satisfactory childcare arrangements.

'Even when mothers used more formal types of care, most also needed either regular or occasional help from informal carers in order to be reliable workers and cope with family emergencies or sickness, unscheduled or ad hoc school holidays or flexibility at the start and end of work'.

Dex (2003) cites Skinner (2003) who found that co-ordinating different child care provision was a particular challenge where families had children of different ages attending different childcare provision. She identified that this put considerable pressure on families where both parents were working and in the case of lone-parent families, parents were often unable to consider the logistics of employment and childcare as a viable option. This is more about flexibility and availability of childcare rather than affordability and the means to pay. Inevitably, when a woman is committing to working full-time in a responsible managerial or professional role, the level and flexibility of support required will increase.

The impact of support networks on a mother's ability to pursue a career full-time and bring up children will now be examined. The literature has suggested that formal paid childcare arrangements do not always cater for the flexibility needed by a working mother. It could therefore be argued that the support network a mother has and is able to rely on, often at short notice, has a significant influence on her ability to work full-time.

Being in employment has inevitable consequences regarding the amount of time a mother has to put into relationships with family and friends. However Dex (2003:8) identifies one network that employed mothers appear to attach great importance to is the child care network. She suggests that,

'Parents are retaining links with their relatives, friends and neighbours because of child care - low income and less mobile families to a greater extent than higher income and more highly mobile ones'.

Dex (2003:8) cites Green and Canny (2003) who suggest that,

'These are important networks and their importance becomes more visible when families have to relocate and are torn away from such relationships. While paid services can replace reliance on family and friends to a certain extent, they cannot offer the same degree of flexibility, trust, reciprocity or social cohesion that social relationships offer'.

It will be interesting to investigate the ability and extent of working parents, particularly mothers working full-time in a professional role, to develop this wider support network in light of the hours they commit to being in the workplace,

indeed those hours where contact is normally made with other parents and neighbours.

The extent of other domestic responsibilities

In addition to childcare, there are many other forms of domestic work which need to be done in order to maintain the running of a household. The domestic division of labour within a household must be a factor which impacts on a woman's ability to work full-time and bring up children. Kan (2008:45) suggests that,

‘Housework has remained largely women's work despite the increase in women's labour force participation in the past three decades. Even when women have a full-time job, they still undertake the bulk of the housework, while men seem to be reluctant to increase the time they spend on housework’.

Kan identifies UK studies (Gershuny et al 1994; Layte, 1999; Morris, 1990) which show that although the amount of time that men are spending on housework is increasing, the increase is slow and gradual and women still undertake the vast majority of domestic responsibility within households. She considers time diary studies collected by Sullivan (2002) in the UK, showing hours spent on housework. The following table shows the findings:

Table 2.2. Percentage of housework carried out by wives in UK

Households

Year	per cent of housework carried out by wives	per cent of housework carried out by wives where both partners work full-time
1975	77 per cent	68 per cent
1987	67 per cent	62 per cent
1997	63 per cent	60 per cent

Source: Yee Kan, M (2008) Does Gender Trump Money? Housework Hours of Husbands and wives in Britain, Work Employment and Society, Volume 22(1): 45-66

It may be the case that women working in managerial or professional roles are able to afford help with domestic tasks, which could ease the pressure considerably. Crompton et al (2007:301) suggest that,

‘In Britain, female professional and managerial employees are more likely than other occupational classes to have the cleaning done by someone else’.

However for many, including lone parents, this may not be an option. If paying for help isn’t an option then minimising the amount of domestic work appears to be one solution. Hakim (1997) reports that women in full-time employment spend about half the time as housewives on domestic work, 18 hours as opposed to 30. Domestic work being defined as house cleaning and tidying, meal preparation, washing up after meals, repairs, gardening, shopping and laundry but not childcare.

My research will identify the number of women who employ domestic help, other than childcare, and how much this eases the pressure and supports women in working full-time. The research will aim to ascertain to what extent women who work full time feel in control of domestic duties. Do women who work full-time spend considerably less time on domestic work and does this add to the pressure and 'guilt' and of trying to juggle everything?

The Significance of Education as an Enabler

The research I will carry out will be focused on professional women or those working in a managerial capacity. As discussed previously, it is more likely that mothers with higher level qualifications will return to the work-place full-time to continue their career, it is therefore important to understand and determine the significance that education and qualifications have in enabling a woman to work full time and bring up children.

Gattrell (2005) identifies characteristics of women who are most likely to continue their career after childbirth; these include being qualified to degree level or above and having a career established before having children.

Harkness (2005:7-8) adds weight to the argument that the level of education a woman has is a significant contributory factor in her employment status following childbirth. She states,

‘The proportion of households with parents with degrees and children under age five who continued in full-time work is more than double amongst those with no educational qualification’.

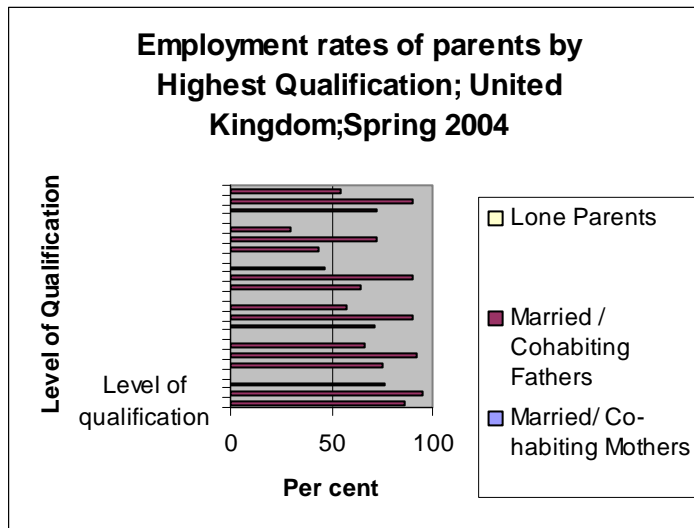
Mavin (2001:183) cites Still and Timms (1998) who point out that 'one of the most significant social changes in the post-war years has been the growing centrality of work in the lives of women'. Mavin (2001:183) suggests that 'research confirms that work is particularly meaningful for educated women with careers'. Debacker (2008:529) suggests that,

'Several researchers have observed that high-skilled women are more strongly attached to the labour market and are therefore less likely to leave it when they have children'.

Professional status or a higher level of education will often mean a woman has established a meaningful career prior to having children. A full time career is likely to play a significant role in a woman's life and will often determine both the status and the financial position a woman holds.

Table 2.3 shows the employment rates of parents by highest qualification in the United Kingdom; Spring 2004. The table shows employment rates were the highest among graduates, with couple mothers and lone parents with a degree level qualification or equivalent having an employment rate of 81per cent.

Table 2.3. Employment rates of parents by highest qualification; United Kingdom; Spring 2004



Source: Labour Force Survey Household Datasets (ONS.Labour Market Trends.July2005)

The literature clearly shows the correlation between levels of educational qualifications and the likelihood of mothers working full-time. It identifies that educated women are more likely to identify with and feel attached to the labour market. I would like to understand if this actually enables mothers to pursue a full-time career and the research I will carry out will endeavour to discover if education enables women to work full-time and if so why.

Education or Preference?

A key theme in the literature relating to working mothers is how mothers combine employment with looking after their children. The literature on the choice mothers make regarding employment and staying at home to care for children is dominated by the work of Hakim (2000) who sheds light on the

reasons women follow particular work and career pathways. Hakim argues that women have different orientations to work, regardless of their levels of education, and categorises women according to their particular 'preference' or the choice they make to work, stay at home, or combine both these elements. Hakim's preference theory states that women in affluent societies can make a real choice between family work and market work. Hakim argues that women can be classified as home-centred (20 per cent of women), adaptive (60 per cent of women) or work centred (20 per cent of women). Home-centred women are those who have no desire to pursue a career or engage in employment, their priority in life is focused on fulfilling domestic and family responsibilities and this will become their role in life. Work-centred women, in contrast, prioritise full-time work in their lives and expect their partners to respect this priority and contribute equally to household and family tasks, which are fitted in around work. Both home and work centred women, Hakim suggests, are committed to their areas of preference throughout life. She believes that women who are work-centred may choose not to have children or if they do have children, they will not be a woman's priority in life.

The largest proportion of women are categorised as adaptive women. Whilst these women endeavour to combine paid employment with domestic and family responsibilities, usually in the form of part-time work, Hakim argues that their primary focus still remains with their family and their engagement in work is not along the lines of pursuing a career. Hakim believes that adaptive women do not want to make a choice between work and family – they want both, and 'if they give priority to family or to paid work, it is a temporary emphasis rather than a lifetime commitment (Hakim, 2000:280)'. She believes that adaptive

women are influenced by changes in lifecycle circumstances and as a consequence, are less likely to make significant achievements in the world of work, preferring a balanced life.

Hakim (2000:189) provides a succinct summary of her categorisation of women, in terms of employment.

‘A minority of women have no interest in employment, careers or economic independence and do not plan to work long term unless things go seriously wrong for them. Their aim is to marry as well as they can and give up paid employment to become full-time home makers and mothers. The group includes highly educated women, as well as those without qualifications. In contrast, other women actively reject the sexual division of labour in the home, expect to work full-time and continuously throughout life, and prefer symmetrical roles for the husband and wife, rather than separate roles. The third group is numerically dominant: women who are determined to combine employment and family work so become secondary earners. They may work full time in early life, but later switch to part-time jobs on a semi-permanent basis, and / or to intermittent employment’.

There are many critiques of Hakim’s work. Arber et al (1996:171) dispute a number of Hakim’s arguments, they particularly disagree with her reasons for the persistence of gender inequality in full-time employment. They state that,

‘Hakim tends to place unwanted emphasis on women’s attitudes and orientation to work, blaming the victim, as indicated by the epithet ‘Grateful Slaves’ (Hakim 1991)’

Whilst they recognise that the reasons behind women’s low rates of participation in full-time employment can, in part, be explained by cultural norms both in the workplace and the family, as well as women having caring and domestic responsibilities, they believe that one of the major barriers to full-time employment for mothers is accessible and affordable childcare. They suggest that practicalities around finding and affording childcare, coupled with often unfavourable employment terms and conditions, particularly the slow adoption of family-friendly policies, are critical barriers to bringing up a family and working full-time.

Arber et al (1996:172) also express disappointment that,

‘Hakim offers no explanation as to why women might have a different orientation to paid work from men, nor of cross national differences in employment behaviour among women, nor any constructive suggestions for further research on why and in what circumstances women take part-time jobs’.

I support the challenges presented by Arber et al and in addition challenge Hakim’s views that preference is more important than education in determining a woman’s employment status. Debacker (2008:530) suggests

‘this assertion has been heavily criticised by other researchers (Duncan et al., 2003 and McRae, 2003), who argue that such structural constraints as education and social background have a more determining impact on labour market behaviour than personal preference’.

Debacker (2008:541) carried out research to gain an insight into the work and care pathways of mothers with varying qualification levels. Particular attention was given to how personal preferences interact with levels of education, in light of the work and views of Catherine Hakim. The results of the study indicated that,

‘Personal preferences do have an impact on the work-care choices of women. However, the effect is more subtle than assumed by Hakim and does not support the hypothesis that preferences mainly influence the work and care behaviour of highly qualified women’.

Whilst Hakim argues that it is easier for highly skilled women to realise their preferences, as they are more often married to a high-skilled partner who has a high earning potential, Debacker's (2008:541) results show that high-skilled mothers are,

‘rather insensitive to the effect of personal preferences, having traditional ideas about the task division between men and women does not prevent highly skilled women from working full-time and using formal childcare.... In addition, despite the increased attention to personal preferences,

structural constraints continue to come into play, particularly for women with low qualifications.

I would also challenge Hakim's preference theory on other accounts. Firstly, the idea that we live in an 'affluent society' that enables all women to make a choice about family work and employment paints an unrealistic picture of modern life. In this respect, Crompton and Harris (1998:118) argue that 'a woman's degree of freedom to make choices is constrained by structural factors that limit their opportunities'. Secondly, Hakim's statement that it is only the 60 per cent of adaptive women who want both work and family can be challenged. It could be argued that a proportion of the 20 per cent of work-centred women also want or need both work and family in their lives and will seek ways in which they can achieve a work - life balance to enable them to work full-time pursuing their careers, in parallel with bringing up their children, this will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

Challenges mothers face in pursuing a career

The chapter so far has been concerned with a woman's decision to return to her career full-time following motherhood and has explored some of the critical factors that may enable her to do this. When a woman, who has a career, becomes a mother she may need to make a decision about her career pathway to enable her to pursue her career and be a mother simultaneously. One decision is to withdraw from paid employment or to reduce working hours. However, this research is concerned with women who have decided to pursue a

career full-time and will now examine the career progression and career pathways of professional women following motherhood.

The literature suggests that one area which has a major influence on a woman's ability to remain in a full time position following motherhood is the organisation she is employed by. An organisation's approach to facilitating employees to work flexibly may be key in enabling a woman to pursue a career full-time and bring up children.

Access to flexible working is often cited as an enabler or preventer for women wanting to return to work full-time following the birth of their children. A report by the Department of Trade and Industry (2003:18) states that 'access to flexible working options on return from maternity leave were an important factor in the decision to return to work'. It cites a study by Hogarth et al (2001) which found that 'ten per cent of mothers who did not return to work after giving birth cited a lack of flexible working arrangements as a barrier to their returning to work'. However, it is difficult to determine whether increased access to flexible working arrangements has had an impact on the increased employment rates of mothers. Walling (2005:282) suggests that,

'although the Labour Force survey collects information about flexible working arrangements, respondents are not asked whether these working arrangements have affected their ability to participate in work. In Spring 2004, 31 per cent of working couple mothers and 26 per cent of working lone parents had some type of flexible working arrangement.

The figures for couple mothers and lone parents with pre-school age children were slightly lower than average, at 27 per cent and 22 per cent respectively, but this could be because they achieved work-family balance through a part-time working pattern instead. The two most common types of flexible working arrangement were flexi-time and term time only working'.

The issue of long hours of work may also be a critical factor preventing mothers from pursuing a full-time professional career. Epstein (1992) in Wass and McNabb (2006: 295) suggests that,

'employers appear to be wary of appointing women to the primary areas of private practice, and women themselves are discouraged, because the long hours culture is incompatible with active parenting'.

The impact of organisations on a woman's ability to pursue a full-time career following motherhood will be explored, in detail during the research interviews.

The literature suggests that progressing vertically within one's chosen career can be challenging for all women, regardless of whether or not they have children. The increase in the number of women entering and graduating from higher education with professional qualifications was highlighted earlier. One would therefore expect to find women taking on more responsibility within the workplace and securing senior positions within organisations. This is not the case, increasing numbers of women are in employment but gender equality in the workplace is not evident. A recent report by the Equality and Human Rights Commissions (2008) explains the trend which has emerged over the five years

is of regression, not progression. In 2008 there were fewer women holding top posts in 12 out of the 25 categories for which figures are available, than any of the previous years.

One explanation for this is the 'glass-ceiling'. The glass-ceiling is a widely used term that describes the inability of women and other minority groups to reach the top of organisational structures. Mathur-Helm (2006:311) described the glass-ceiling effect as 'the struggles women face in attempting to move up to the senior, executive and top management positions in corporate organisations'.

Mathur-Helm believes that barriers to career progression for women do exist and suggests that whilst women have made remarkable progress in obtaining senior positions within careers of their choice, there are still very few women who have succeeded in securing positions at the highest levels of business. She suggests that the glass ceiling remains and states that,

'The glass ceiling considered a myth by many, is real and is nurtured by the organisational culture, policies and strategies and is highly presided by the masculine values and styles, besides women's own inadequacies such as: their decisions, qualifications and skills, career plans and career prospects. Thus many women jump off the career wagon frustrated and disillusioned before it reaches the top echelons.' (Mathur-Helm, 2006:318)

In contrast, a theme that emerged from the literature is that the glass ceiling may not solely be imposed by organisational barriers, it may be imposed by

women themselves due to their beliefs about their ability to both progress up the career ladder and bring up a family. Whitmarsh et al (2007) state that research carried out in the states by Catalyst in 2003 identified that 26 per cent of women who were only one level below the most senior level in their profession, were not interested in the promotion. .

This is supported by Cavendish (2008:1) who suggests that 'women in their thirties often face the next move up the career ladder with dread'. She comments that, 'we mothers hold a steady course, fearing that any deviation will send our households veering out of control'.

Perhaps, therefore, women are making decisions about their career pathway and progression, based upon their own internal barriers or glass ceilings. A number of articles support the concept of women imposing their own glass ceilings. Rice (2009:1) supports this point of view and suggests that,

'The truth is that, these days, the barriers exist more in our own heads than in any old-school system of sexism. We've reached a point where we feel confused and conflicted about what we want from work. In other words, it's women now who are constructing a glass ceiling above their own heads – because they want more from life than just the grind of a very senior position and the cripplingly long hours that go with it'.

Simon (1996:5) presents findings that go some way towards supporting this argument. She uses the terminology 'double-glazed glass ceiling', as she

recognises that there is not just one layer of glass and cites 'family obligations as one of the barriers to managerial inequity'. In her study 42 per cent of females questioned, stated it was the woman's 'own lack of agency' that prevented them from obtaining the most senior positions within the organisation.

Structure and Agency

The question as to whether women's career progression is affected by external glass ceilings or restrictions they impose upon themselves is one of structure or agency. The structure and agency debate is an ongoing one within the field of social science. Stones (1988:98) describes it as 'one of the most fundamental issues in sociology'. The question he poses is,

'Are the actions of individuals and groups determined by large structures of social life or do actors make voluntary choices according to their own values or objectives?'

In other words, structure refers to factors which have the potential to impact upon human beings' lives such as gender, race, age, social class or background and agency refers to human beings' ability to do what they please without constraints and limitations. The question in relation to women's career progression is which is the dominant influence in shaping women's career paths, that of agency (the women's own decisions and actions) or that of structure (environmental factors, often beyond a woman's control)?

One of the key issues in sociological theory is that of social ontology. Potter (2000:242) defines ontology as, 'the inquiry into the nature of being or existence'. In its most straightforward terms, there are two opposing views, one with an emphasis on structure and one with an emphasis on agency and interaction. Social structure refers to relationships between groups of individuals in terms of the external context in which actions occur. A structuralist approach argues that the context in which we operate is the major influence on the actions of human beings. This approach was most prevalent in early sociology, as sociologists such as Durkheim, sought to demonstrate the social world was not based on individual actions and tried to justify the need to study the impact and effect of structures

The opposing viewpoint is from those who believe the approach is based on interaction or agency. This is sometimes called a hermeneutical approach. Potter (2000:236) defines hermeneutics as 'the interpretative study of the meaning of human actions'. The debate can be summarised as that of one between those who believe in methodological individualism, where the actions of human beings and their interactions result in a social structure and those who believe in methodological holism where human beings are an element of a social structure, which influences the way they interact, the decisions they make and the actions they take.

It would be difficult to argue that agency or structure are solely responsible for the actions that take place within our lives, this viewpoint fails to acknowledge

the complexity of the world we live in. Giddens, in his structuration theory, reconciles the two opposing views of ontology by acknowledging that structure and agency are interrelated. Busco (2009:250) explains,

‘the basic domain of social science is neither the experience of the subject, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices, where these two realms are incorporated and, ultimately, synthesised..... Accordingly, the constitution of agency and structure are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality. They are at the same time, the medium and outcome of the practices and activities they recursively organise in the duality of structure’.

Structuration theory therefore brings together the two theories acknowledging that human beings are aware of their actions but these actions are rarely carried out in isolation, they are carried out within a social context, which may serve to shape, constrain or even at times determine what they do.

Weyer (2007:483) tried to come up with a ‘theoretical explanation’ as to why women continued to hit glass ceilings which prevented them from securing senior positions. She explains that,

‘within the structural / cultural explanations, there are two prominent theories, social role theory (Eagly, 1987) and expectation states theory (Berger et al., 1980). These theories are both based on the fact that men and women are allocated different roles in society due to their gender. The

family and occupational settings, particularly contribute to the allocation of roles defined solely on the basis of gender. In addition, there are specific expectations that are held toward individuals occupying a particular position or membership of a specific social category (Eagly et al 2003).'

Social role theory, as the name suggests, states that men and women will exhibit different behaviours and assume different roles due to the perception of gender by society. This will include women taking up more 'feminine' roles such as caring and showing fewer male traits such as ambition and aggression. The expectation states theory is explained by Balkwell (1991:356) as 'the translation of an actor's performance expectations for self and others, once formed into overt social behaviour'. The theory states that if members of small task focused groups are asked to allocate levels of task competence, meaning who is likely to be the most adept at completing a task, within the group, decisions on allocating competence will be made based on information such as gender, age and class. This pre-determined decision making will lead to power differentials within the group and status characteristics are positively correlated with performance expectations. For example, a young male may be allocated a high level of competence for a physical task, whereas a middle aged female may be allocated a high level of competence for a caring role.

Weyer (2007:496) explains that,

'both theories suggest that elements of social structure are causes for the continued existence of the glass ceiling that keeps women from advancing to top-level leadership positions. Social role theory and

expectation states theory are both grounded in the belief that inequalities between men and women are caused by the greater social significance and general competence attributed to men over women (Carli and Eagly, 2001; Karakowsky and Siegel, 1999; Ridgeway, 2001)'.

Forster (2000:29) looked at research carried out within Higher Education as to why considerably lower numbers of women compared to men women have secured senior academic roles. He cites a number of researchers who have considered barriers to progression for women in Higher Education (Sommerkorn, 1996; Heward, 1994; Bagilhole, 1993; Acker, 1989, 1992; Cann et al., 1991; Jackson, 1990). He classifies the main structural barriers identified as 'recruitment and selection policies; the lack of mentors and role models; career development and promotion policies; appraisal systems; and institutional male power and the roles of women academics'. (Forster, 2000:29) His research clearly identifies and focuses on structural barriers that prevent female academics from progressing within their careers.

In contrast, as previously discussed, there are a number of writers (Mathur-Helm, 2006; Simon, 1996; Whitmarsh et al 2007) who believe that the influence of agency (the women's own decisions and actions) is as strong as or stronger than the influence of structure (environmental factors) in imposing a glass ceiling to career progression. This argument is supported, to a certain extent, by Sommerkorn (1996) cited by Forster (2001:30) who believes that,

'women are still hampered by attitudes towards their non-work responsibilities. While crèches, domestic help, support from partners and relatives can all help with child care, the ultimate responsibility for

children invariably seems to rest with women. It is women who usually have to take time off work to look after sick children or leave work early in order to collect them from school’.

Whilst the term glass ceiling is invariably associated with career progression, what has emerged from the literature is that women are perhaps making conscious choices regarding their capacity to cope with both a career and a family. This is in line with Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) cited by Grady and McCarthy (2008:602) who refer to women’s careers in the concept of a ‘kaleidoscope’ which,

‘emphasises the importance of authenticity, balance and challenge for women in their professional lives. Authenticity refers to the need to be genuine and true to oneself, knowing one’s strengths and limitations and discovering “one’s true voice”. A need for balance underlines “an upward driven set of career accomplishments”and a need for challenge where work is stimulating with opportunity for growth and development. It is argued that the careers of women, in contrast to men, are more “relational” in that women make decisions about their career options after they have considered the impact of their decision on others eg their family’.

The literature evidences the lack of success, if success is measured by attainment, of women obtaining the most senior positions in organisations. The research I carry out will explore the concept of ambition and working mothers’ desire and need to achieve success, in

terms of promotion to senior positions. It will also explore the concept of the glass ceiling and identify to what extent this concept is impacting upon women's ability and desire to achieve. More importantly, the research will explore the themes that have arisen from the literature which may help answer the research question – what enables women to pursue a full time career and bring up children? An important concept which has materialised through the literature is that of women being realistic about their own capacity, which may influence their decision making around career progression and pathways. Another concept which has arisen is that of women opting to pursue lateral or horizontal career paths, perhaps as a result of choices being around their capacity to manage a career and motherhood.

The chapter will now explore to what extent women may choose alternative career pathways as a coping mechanism to enable them to pursue a career full-time and bring up children.

Do women actively seek alternative career pathways?

Literature on career development models tends to focus on traditional models of vertical progression, where progressing to the top of the organisational hierarchy is associated with the ultimate achievement. Mavin (2001) suggests women and men interpret career success in different ways. Men use tangible and measurable ways such as salary, job title, grade or promotion. Women, on the other hand, appear to assess success in both their professional and

personal lives more subjectively, such as levels of satisfaction, quality of life or personal sense of growth, development and achievement. Researchers have identified a need for new theoretical models of women's career development which reflect the uniqueness and complexity in comparison with the traditional career development of men (Whitmarsh et al, 2007; Scase and Goffe, 1989; Crompton, 1999).

As Whitmarsh et al (2007:225) citing Cook et al (2002) point out,

‘current career development concepts continue to reflect male worldviews. These basic assumptions include a separation of work and family roles in people’s lives; a reverence for individualism and autonomy; the centrality of work in people’s lives; a linear, progressive and rational nature of the career development process; and the structure of opportunity’.

Mavin (2001:185) cites Scase and Goffee (1989) who argue that women’s

‘preference for job satisfaction and challenge, as opposed to promotion, may result from women being less inclined to plan a career pathway for themselves due to circumstances that may interrupt a structured plan such as motherhood, career breaks or moving with a partner’s career’.

Hakim (1996:85) suggests,

‘if we want to understand the choices women make, research must focus on women’s plans for their own lives. Research shows that only a

minority of women plan long term careers, aim at higher grade occupations and invest accordingly in appropriate educational qualifications. Even among college and university graduates, a minority of women have firm plans for employment careers; most expect to work while giving priority to marriage and motherhood'.

As mentioned previously, the literature suggests that the professional field a woman works in may have an impact on her ability to pursue a career full-time and bring up children. Whitmarsh et al (2007:232) found that women whose career fell within the 'female dominated career choices' were better placed to blend career with family, whereas those whose career choice fell outside this category were more likely to experience conflicting demands.

This is in line with findings by O'Kelly (2004:2) who suggests that that in some fields of work, particularly those which are traditionally male dominated, becoming a mother may be a contributory factor towards hindering career progress. She states that,

'Despite the number of women qualifying from medical school, only 20 per cent of hospital consultants are female. Although they outnumber male law graduates by 10 per cent, only 37 per cent of solicitors are women and just 24 per cent of those are partners in the firms where they work. In the top 10 law firms, the number of female partners is only 15 per cent. Among the FT Top 100 companies, 22 now have more than one woman on their boards, yet 32 have no women at all.'

Whilst the literature suggests that mothers experience barriers to career progression, this does not mean that professional women stop working following motherhood. As figure 2.3 shows, 81 per cent per cent of mothers with degree level qualifications are in employment (ONS Labour Market Trends 2005). It would appear, therefore, that mothers are making decisions about their careers to enable them to remain in employment, but perhaps not in their pre-motherhood role.

Whitmarsh et al (2007:232) conducted a study into professional women's career paths focusing on an exploration of choices and challenges. They discovered that women's career paths reflected the different choices made, as women undertook decisions related to the importance of work and family responsibilities in their lives. The majority of women in the study chose both career and motherhood. This inevitably led to some form of compromise. Whitmarsh et al (2007:321) cite Gottfredson (1981) who describes compromise as,

'A significant process, as individuals often discover that as their time comes, they will be unable to implement their most preferred choices. As a result of the demands of external reality, women often adjust career aspirations to provide a compatible match with marriage and family responsibilities'.

Compromise may be the reason that evidence exists to demonstrate that women tend to prefer and experience lateral rather than vertical career paths. Vertical career pathways are all about progression to the top of the

organisational hierarchy, whereas horizontal career paths include careers that move sideways exploring alternative career avenues, rather than seeking promotion. Findings from White et al's (1992) study showed that women valued achievement in their lives, though this was attained through securing challenging and satisfying positions rather than advancing to the top of organisational hierarchy. O'Leary (1997:97) points out that,

'Women's career development models are premised on the notion of achieving a shifting balance between career and other significant relationships....the career-ambitious individual is one who measures success in both professional and personal arenas through subjective measures such as perceived degrees of challenge, satisfaction or sense of growth or development. Here the only competition evident is that associated with the individual challenging him or herself'.

Whilst there is a considerable amount of literature suggesting that women often choose a lateral or horizontal career pathway following motherhood (McNabb and Wass, 2006; Crompton and Harris, 1998; O'Leary, 1997; Connolly and Gregory; 2008), there is a gap in the literature exploring the decision making process behind this choice. Has it really been a choice or has it been a compromise women have opted for in order to combine a career and motherhood? In the research I will carry out, I will aim to unpick women's need for achievement and the sacrifices they have made which may have prevented them progressing to the top of the organisational hierarchy.

The impact of the ability to achieve a work-life balance

It has been acknowledged throughout this chapter, the pressures that a woman who combines pursuing a full-time career and bringing up children faces. The concept of being able to achieve a work-life balance and minimise work-home conflict would appear to be a key factor in enabling a woman to cope with both elements of her life.

The majority of work-life balance literature focuses on achieving a work-life balance, which for women is often associated with working part-time. The role of part-time employment in the balancing of women's employment and family lives has generated an immense amount of literature (Warren, 2004; Walters, 2005; Crompton, 2002). The literature shows that a high number of women experience conflict between their roles of wife, mother and employee (Lewis and Cooper, 1988). So how does a mother working full-time achieve a work-life balance and does obtaining a work-life balance enable women to pursue a full-time career and bring up children?

There is much literature around both work-life balance and the conflict that can occur between pressures of work and pressures outside work (Allan et al; 2007; Crompton et al 2007; Hosking and Western, 2008). Clutterbuck (2003:9) defines work-life balance as,

‘being aware of different demands on time and energy; having the ability to make choices in the allocation of time and energy; knowing what values to apply to choices and making choices’.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985:77) refer to work / non-work conflict as,

‘A form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation by the work [family] role is made difficult by virtue of participation in the family [work] role.’

Allan et al. (2007:223) carried out a non gender specific study exploring the question, ‘Do workers with high demand jobs experience high work / non-work-conflict?’ Job demand was measured through four variables; working hours, management support, employee control and workload pressure. Allan et al found these four variables are consistent with Theorell and Karasek’s (2000) influential demand-control model which argues that,

‘high demand jobs can result in lower quality family interactions, as the worker is recovering from time spent at work and thus emotionally unavailable for their family’.

The findings showed that the key factor influencing work / non-work conflict is workload pressure, which is the extent to which organisations expect employees to do more than can be fitted into a working day. Findings showed that household arrangements are also important; employees who have children or cohabit with partners are more likely to experience work/non-work conflict than those who are single and without children.

Voydanoff (2005:720) looked at work demands and work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts. Three types of work demand were considered ‘time-based

demands', 'strain based demands' and 'boundary spanning demands'. She found that,

'The results provide consistent support for the hypotheses predicting relationships between work demands and work-to-family conflict with one exception, all work demands show statistically significant positive relationships with work-to-family conflict.... where resources are fixed or finite, such as time, energy and psychological involvement, they may be insufficient to meet domain needs and are not available for other domains.'

This lack of available time may make it difficult for employees to perform family duties and maintain family relationships. Thereby, reduced working hours, particularly part-time jobs, are frequently the choice of working mothers to give them more time to care for children and carry out domestic responsibilities.

However what is the impact of demands and finite resources on full-time working mothers? One of the implications of being a full-time working mother is likely to be the lack of time available purely to oneself. Camporrese et al.

(1998:142) argued that 'free time is a bane of women with a job, above all when they have children'.

Warren (2007) identified a lack of research about the significance of leisure time within working women's work-life balance and carried out a piece of research to explore how women in both part-time and full-time employment view the amount of leisure time they are able to access. Warren (2007:106) cites Clough (2001) who suggests that,

‘research has shown that leisure time is strongly gendered, as well as classed, determined by levels of both caring and paid employment responsibilities, with women often sacrificing their own leisure needs for those of their family members’.

It is generally accepted that having some leisure time in life is important and supports work-life balance and one’s health and wellbeing. Warren (2007:106) cites Lloyd and Auld (2002) who suggest that research has shown that the so called ‘person-centred’ attribute of leisure, that is satisfaction with leisure, exhibits the strongest correlations with reported quality of life. The results of Warren’s research, which compares full and part-time working females with and without children working in three occupational sectors – manual, clerical and professional, reports women with children working full time in a professional capacity as being the least satisfied group of women with regards to their amount and use of leisure time but the most satisfied group of women in terms of satisfaction with their social lives. The reasons behind why this might be the case will be explored during my research.

The literature review revealed a significant gap in the relationship between full-time working mothers and work-life balance. My research will explore the factors which enable a mother to pursue a career full-time and balance this with her family and other aspects of her life. It will explore whether identifying strategies to achieve a work-life-family balance enable mothers to work full time.

Conclusion

Throughout the literature review, the inability to gain an accurate picture of the number or proportion of mothers working in a full-time, professional or managerial role was frustrating. The need to identify and present statistical information and balance this with a theoretical approach was challenging. The research question led me into many fields of research, some of them with immense amounts of literature but not all necessarily relevant to the research question.

The review of literature was extremely useful in focusing the direction and content of my research, however I believe that interviews will identify elements of the literature which require further exploration and I intend to tackle this as the need arises.

Literature on the individual circumstances of women was reasonably easy to access. The literature showed that the influence of financial factors are key in a woman's decision making regarding her employment status following motherhood but there was no relationship identified between financial circumstances and ability to work full-time. This literature raises questions regarding conscious decisions a professional woman makes in terms of planning a family, both with regards to the number of children and the length of time between having children. This will be explored through my research, I would like to establish to what extent are women making conscious decisions

about the number of children they have, in order for them to be able to pursue their careers full-time.

Examining elements that may support a woman in pursuing a full-time career, raised questions about help that can be employed both through financial means and also through connections and support networks. Through my research it is hoped to gain a clearer picture about how critical the external help a woman employs, or has access to, is in enabling a woman to work full-time and bring up her children. The impact of a partner appears to have a significant influence on both a woman's decision and her ability to work full-time and bring up children. The research I undertake will seek to establish how significant the impact of a partner is. The need for reliable childcare and, in addition, informal support was highlighted as being a critical element for working mothers. Again, my research will explore this, particularly in terms of what works, in terms of childcare and informal support networks.

The literature has revealed explicit links between levels of educational qualifications and the likelihood of mothers working full-time and has offered some limited explanation for this. The research I will carry out will explore this relationship further and endeavour to discover if education actually enables women to work full-time and if so why.

The concept of glass ceilings, in relation to women's career progression, has been explored. This theme emerged from trying to establish the impact an organisation may have on a woman's ability to work full-time and bring up

children. An interesting theme for consideration is that the glass ceiling may not solely be imposed by organisational barriers, women may impose their own restrictions too. The structure and agency debate was explored in relation to women's career progression and the concept of external barriers and internal barriers.

Whilst I have been able to identify a considerable amount of literature suggesting that women often choose a lateral or horizontal career pathway following motherhood, there is a gap in the literature exploring the decision making process behind this choice. In the research I will carry out, I will aim to unpick women's need for achievement and the sacrifices they have made which may have prevented them progressing to the top of the organisational hierarchy.

A significant gap in literature around work and family / life balance in women working full-time has been identified. This will be addressed during interviews when I will explore the factors which enable a mother to pursue a career full-time and balance this with her family and other aspects of her life. I will endeavour to establish if being able to achieve a work-life-family balance enables mothers to work full time.

The next chapter will examine, in detail, the approach taken to the research undertaken in this study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Introduction

Literature relating to the research question, 'What enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children' was identified and analysed in the previous chapter. The themes that arose from the literature review influenced both the approach to the research and the key elements that this study aimed to explore. A number of key areas which may have a significant impact or influence on enabling a woman to return to work full-time following motherhood were identified. The literature review also identified gaps in the literature and areas for further exploration during the research. This chapter explains and justifies the research paradigm, research approach and research methods used during this study. The chapter is structured around Kvale's (1996:88) model of seven stages of an interview investigation, which is outlined below and will conclude by looking at the limitations of the research conducted.

Figure 3.1 Seven stages of an interview investigation (Kvale,1996:88)

- *'Thematising* Formulate the purpose of the investigation and describe the concept of the topic to be investigated before the interviews start. The *why* and *what* of the investigation should be clarified before the question of *how* – method – is posed.

- *Designing* Plan the design of the study, taking into consideration all seven stages of the investigation before the interviewing starts.

- *Interviewing* Conduct the interviews based on an interview guide and with a reflective approach to the knowledge sought and the interpersonal relation of the interview situation.

- *Transcribing* Prepare the interview material for analysis, which commonly includes a transcription from oral speech to written text.

- *Analysing* Decide, on the basis of the purpose and topic of the investigation, and on the nature of the interview material, which methods of analysis are appropriate for the interviews.

- *Verifying* Ascertain the generalisability, reliability and validity of the interview findings

- *Reporting* Communicate the findings of the study and the methods applied in a form that lives up to scientific criteria, takes the ethical aspects of the investigation into consideration, and that results in a readable product'.

Thematizing

The aim of this study is to answer the question 'What enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children?' The specific research objectives are:

1. To gather the necessary background information from women, in order to establish to what extent personal circumstances impact upon women's ability to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children.
2. To identify specific 'enablers' or enabling factors which enable women to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children.
3. To determine patterns in strategies women have to enable them to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children.

A number of key themes emerged from the literature review which informed the focus of this research. Much of the discussion in the literature review focused on 'enablers' and identifying what the specific enablers are is a critical part of the research. In addition, a number of other questions were raised during the literature review. The aim is to explore these further during the study, hopefully providing a more holistic approach to answering the question by following lines of enquiry which I feel are key to the study.

For the purpose of this research the term paradigm is defined by Bogdan and Biklen (1988:22) as 'a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research'.

For this research an interpretivist paradigm was identified as being the most appropriate approach, as the aim of the research was to undertake a detailed investigation into the experience of working mothers. It was considered that a qualitative methodology using an interpretivist approach would be the most effective method of gaining an understanding of what enables women to continue to pursue a career full-time and bring up children. It was anticipated that the interpretivist paradigm would capture how women perceive and make sense of their own situations.

Blaikie (2000:15) suggests that,

'An interpretivist approach to research is distinctive from others because it sees people and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as the primary data sources'.

He goes on to say,

'Interpretivists are concerned with understanding the social world people have produced and which they reproduce through their continuing activities. This everyday reality consists of the meanings and interpretations given by the social actors to their actions, other people's

actions, social situations, and naturally and humanly created objects. In short, in order to negotiate their way around the world and make sense of it, social actors have to interpret their activities together, and it is these meanings, embedded in language, that constitute their social reality'.

As a researcher, I was mindful that the data collected would be mainly descriptive in nature, although there would be some need to collect quantitative information in the form of factual details. Having identified the benefits of using an interpretivist research paradigm, including the ability to effectively address questions about human behaviour, I was aware of the limitations of this paradigm which were around reliability and validity of information and the issues around presenting the information gathered as the actual or statistical truth.

From an epistemological position, the evidence and knowledge that will be gathered during this research is largely dependent on the information that women share. This information or evidence will be the justification for the argument or explanation that will be put forward from the evidence collected. The research is concerned with the women's own perspectives of their situation and it is important to be aware that all women will have different circumstances and the information they share could be dependent upon their current personal circumstances, their mindset on the day of interview and their previous experiences. Whilst the research aims to explore a period of the women's lives, the evidence gathered from the interview will be based on spending a very short period of time with the women.

The research aims to understand and interpret a woman's experiences and her perspectives of these experiences. A methodology which can effectively study human behaviour and experience is required, where human beings are recognised as individuals, each with a unique set of characteristics all living within different circumstances, influenced by a variety of environmental factors. Denzin and Lincoln (2003:510) cite Karp (1996) who points out that,

‘underneath the rates, correlations, and presumed causes of behaviour are real human beings who are trying to make sense of their lives’.

Effective research will therefore depend upon the identification of an appropriate research method which will be able to encapsulate the uniqueness of human beings and the world they live in.

The proposed methodology is focused on qualitative research, based solely on qualitative research interviews. Denzin and Lincoln (2005:238) explain that,

‘Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter and qualitative investigators think they can get closer to the actor’s perspective through detailed interviewing.’

One advantage of qualitative research interviews is that issues can be explored in detail and depth. The use of open-ended questions enables participants to respond in their own words and give responses that are personal, thoughtful and unanticipated by the researcher. In addition, the researcher has the ability to probe initial participant responses to extract additional information or explore responses for further meaning. The researcher has the opportunity to develop

a rapport with the participant and adapt the delivery to engage and get the most from the interviewee. As McNamara (1999:2) points out,

‘Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant’s experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic’.

The limitations of qualitative research interviews were considered and measures were put into place, wherever possible, to minimise these limitations. It was acknowledged that data is collected from a relatively small number of individuals, which means that it is difficult to generalise findings to the larger population. It is difficult to demonstrate a consistency of rigour throughout the research process. The volume of data collected makes analysis and interpretation time consuming. In addition, the quality of the research can be dependant on the skills and experience of the interviewer (Patton, 2002).

Whilst these limitations were recognised, I believed that a positivist approach, involving quantitative research methods would not be the most effective way of informing this study. However, it is acknowledged that a quantitative research method would have enabled a broader study, capturing data from a larger sample size and enabling the results to be generalised more accurately. Quantitative methods are designed to collect and analyse numerical data usually involving few variables and many cases. Reliability and validity are both key issues in quantitative research and this enables findings to be generalised to the whole population (O'Neill, 2006).

Designing

The interview schedule was designed in order to answer the research question and explore further the themes that had been raised during the literature review. I considered the type of interview format that would be most effective in eliciting the required information and decided on a semi-structured interview where,

‘The interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference from that typically found in a structured interview schedule.

Also, the interviewer usually has some altitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies’. (Bryman 2001:110)

Whilst the semi-structured one to one interview was the chosen method, alternative methods were considered. Focus groups would have enabled discussion amongst women (Kitzinger, 1994), however due to the personal nature of some of the themes I felt that women may have been reluctant to share information regarding their personal circumstances and employment situation with other women from the same organisation.

Kerlinger (1970) in Cohen et al (2001:275) identified three kinds of items which are used in the construction of interview schedules ‘fixed alternative items...open-ended items and scale items’. In this study open-ended items were chosen as they gave respondents a framework to shape their answers but

at the same time gave them freedom to express their views and opinions on the subject matter. When designing the interview schedule, I recognised that there was potential for duplication in responses given to questions asked, such as reasons for working full-time and the importance of salary. It was also recognised that not all questions might be appropriate for all women, such as the impact of a partner when the woman is single. I felt it was important to have the flexibility to omit questions if necessary and also to probe further by asking supplementary questions if themes of interest emerged.

By using open ended questions I hoped to encourage women to give full and detailed responses. In addition, 'open ended situations can also result in unexpected or unanticipated answers which may suggest unthought of relationships or hypotheses'. (Cohen et al, 2001:278) This was something that I was keen to promote during the research.

An interview schedule was drawn up. (Appendix One). Questions at the beginning of the interview were closed and factual, enabling a picture to be built up of the woman and her circumstances. These could be categorised as background and demographic questions (Spradley, 1979; Patton, 1980 cited in Cohen et al, 2001:276). They were straightforward questions that also served the purpose of easing the women gently into the interview. The remainder of the questions were grouped into themes which were:

- Exploration of reasons behind working full-time
- Significance of education
- Exploration of factors which enable women to work full-time

- Personal circumstances
- Enablers / Barriers
- Work Life Balance
- Organisational Impact
- Choice regarding career direction

The themed questions could be categorised as descriptive, experience, behaviour, knowledge and feeling questions (Spradley, 1979 and Patton, 1980 cited in Cohen et al, 2001:276). These questions, by the nature of them, would be answered by an unstructured response. Trochim (2006:2) describes,

‘an unstructured response format as written text, if the respondent (or interviewer) writes down text as the response, you've got an unstructured response format. These can vary from short comment boxes to the transcript of an interview’.

Although I would have little control over the unstructured response it would allow the respondent to have the freedom to answer the question as fully as she chose.

Having drawn up the interview schedule, it was piloted on three friends / colleagues who met the research criteria. This was done with the aim of determining the approximate length of interviews and also the participants' reactions to the questions. Following the pilot, bullet pointed prompts were added to the interview schedule, to use with the open ended questions. This was done in order to ensure that the same themes were being covered consistently. Cohen et al (2001:281) cite Morrison (1993) who suggests that ‘the

framing of questions for a semi-structured interview will need to consider prompts and probes'. It was also noted and actioned during the pilot that I ought to give the participant a brief background to myself and reassure them that if they felt uncomfortable answering any of the questions then they could move on to the next one.

Sampling

I was very aware, throughout the research, of the need to be constantly mindful of the ethical issues of insider research and access. Not only was I an insider in terms of a researcher whose personal details and circumstances would be similar to the target population (Griffith, 1998) but I also worked for the same organisation as the majority of women interviewed. The literature contains differing views and opinions as to what extent being an insider conducting research impacts upon the process and outcomes. Mercer (2007:8) describes the pros and cons of insiderness as a 'double-edged sword'. On the issue of familiarity, Mercer suggests that,

'Insiders will undoubtedly have a better initial understanding of the social setting because they know the context; they understand the subtle and diffuse links between situations and events and they can assess the implications of following particular avenues of enquiry'.

In addition she cites Hannabus (2000) who notes:

‘The [insider] researcher knows his / her environment well, knows by instinct what can be done and how far old friendships and favours can be pressed, just when and where to meet up for interviews, what the power structures and the moral mazes and subtexts of the company are and so what taboos to avoid, what shibboleths to mumble and bureaucrats to placate. They are familiar with the culture, the routines and the scripts of the workplace’. (Mercer, 2007:8)

Whilst recognising some of the advantages of being an inside researcher, I was also mindful of the fact that familiarity with the workplace and environment can make insiders more likely to make assumptions, including that their own perceptions and experiences are similar to those of participants. It may also be more awkward to ask probing questions about sensitive areas and participants may be more reluctant to divulge personal information.

The identification of respondents for the interview was completed by a number of means, with one being by far the most successful. The target population for this research had to meet the following criteria:

- a) Women who were employed full-time, who worked a minimum of 37 hours per week.
- b) Women who were employed in a professional or managerial capacity.
- c) Women who had at least one child of primary school age or younger.

- d) Women who had gone back to work full-time following their period of maternity leave.

Due to restrictions on time and the need to interview all women on a face to face basis, women had to be available for interview either near where I lived or worked. The following avenues of contact were explored:

- 1) Initial email contact with all Heads of Service within Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) asking them to cascade information to any of their staff who they felt met the criteria.
- 2) Conversation with the Human Resources Department at the University of Lincoln asking them to cascade an email to all staff who they felt might meet the criteria.
- 3) Letter sent directly to potential interviewees distributed through Great Wood Farm Day Nursery (where one of my children attended).
- 4) Letter sent directly to potential interviewees distributed through Ropsley Primary School (where one of my children attended).

I was and still am employed by Lincolnshire County Council. This had ethical implications regarding insider access. I therefore had to seek permission from my Head of Service to conduct the study within Lincolnshire County Council and within work time. As I worked for Lincolnshire County Council, I had direct access to the email addresses of all Heads of Service within the authority. This was set up as a grouping on outlook and went directly to 107 members of staff.

As a senior manager, a Head of Service has a number of staff working under them, and was be able to cascade the email directly to their staff.

On 28th May 2008, an email was sent to all Heads of Service (Appendix Two) requesting their help in cascading the information to women who they felt met the criteria. This proved to be an extremely effective way of contacting women, both in terms of time and the number of potential interviewees who got in touch. The response was overwhelming; within 4 weeks, contact had been made by 87 women who wished to take part in the interviews. This indicated both the fact that women were prepared to be interviewed by an inside researcher and also that there was interest in and perceived importance of the subject area. However, not all of the women met the criteria, many had children who were outside the age criteria and a number didn't work full-time.

Contact was made with the University of Lincoln Human Resources Department in April 2008. An initial discussion with a member of staff appeared promising, it was suggested that if a letter was sent by email to the staff member then it would be circulated to members of staff who met the criteria. The letter was sent to the University on the 8th May 2008. (Appendix Three) After several weeks with no responses, contact was made with the member of staff who appeared to be unobtainable. At this point, responses had started coming in from Lincolnshire County Council so I made a decision not to pursue this avenue any further. The rationale behind using the University of Lincoln to identify women who met the criteria was that the university is one of Lincoln's largest employers and by the nature of its business it was likely to have women who met the

criteria. It was also close to Lincolnshire County Council's Head Office which logistically made it very convenient.

Great Wood Farm Nursery is a nursery providing full day care for children aged 0-5 and out of school care for children up to the age of 11. It is the nursery that my children attended. I was therefore familiar with the clientele and was aware that a number of the women whose children attended the nursery met the criteria. Following a discussion with the owners of the nursery they agreed to send a letter out to all parents. (Appendix Three) The response was disappointing and only 6 women contacted me to express an interest in being part of the research. This was possibly due to the potential intimacy of the interview where women who I knew, may have been reluctant to share personal information with me. It logistically proved difficult to co-ordinate convenient times to meet the women. Several worked in London and lived some distance from me which made an evening meeting difficult. In total 3 women from the nursery were interviewed, appointments were made with 4 but the last appointment didn't materialise due to complications. Due to constraints on my time and those of the potential participants, this method of both contacting women and then arranging to meet them was time consuming and frustrating, for a relatively small number of participants. Whilst it is acknowledged that persevering with the other 3 women might have added a contrast to the majority of women interviewed, the factors of time and inconvenience outweighed this avenue being pursued.

Ropsley Primary School is a small village school with 100 children on roll. At the time, one of my children attended the school. Initially this appeared to be a plausible route for finding women who met the criteria. However, after a brief meeting with the Head teacher who was happy to authorise letters to be sent out but didn't believe many mothers met the criteria, it was decided not to use this route for contacting women. The reasons for this were due to the Head Teacher's response, due to the problems I was having arranging appointments with women contacted through the nursery but mainly due to the large number of responses received through Lincolnshire County Council.

The women were allocated interviews on a first come first serve basis, providing they met the criteria. A brief telephone conversation was had with each woman to explain the basis of my research, to establish whether they fully met the criteria and to arrange an appointment to meet up for a face to face interview. At this stage a number of other benefits of working for the same organisation as the majority of the participants materialised. Access to the participants' electronic diaries assisted with finding a mutually convenient time, and a suitable meeting room could be arranged if the interviewee didn't have access to one. On a practical note, I had access to car parking at the workplace and tried to either block interviews into one day or arrange them around other work commitments whilst in the area. Once an appointment had been made the interviewee was sent a letter confirming the details of the interview (Appendix Four) and an informed consent form to consider prior to the interview. (Appendix Five)

The interviews were conducted over 4 months from May 2008 to September 2008. Initially 50 interviews were planned, but early on in the interview process I became acutely aware of how time consuming the research was. It was necessary to allow 1.5 hours for every interview and a travelling time of at least an hour either side. This realisation coincided with being offered a new job in July 2008, with a September 2008 start, so flexibility for interviewing during working time would have been severely restricted from September. Following a discussion with my supervisor it was agreed to reduce the number of interviews to 30. Kvale (1996:101) suggests that 'one conducts interviews with as many people as necessary in order to get the information sought'.

A total of 30 women were invited for interview, for logistical reasons one interview didn't materialise leaving 29 interviews which actually happened. A profile of the interviewees is shown on the next page, a fuller profile can be seen in the appendices (Appendix Six).

Table 3.1 Profile of Interviewees

	No of children	Ages of children	Marital Status	Ed Qual (max)	Job Level	Type of earner
1	3	2,3,17	Married	Masters	Senior Manager	Sole Earner
2	1	5	Married	Masters	Middle Manager	Secondary
3	2	3,5	Married	Masters	Middle Manager	Dual Breadwinning Couple
4	2	1,5, 16 (step daughter)	Married	Degree	Manager	Primary
5	1	3	Married	Professional Qualification	Middle Manager	Secondary
6	1	11	Married	Professional Qualification	Senior Manager	Primary
7	1	4	Married	Degree equivalent	Middle Manager	Primary
8	1	7	Divorced (living with partner)	Degree	Manager	Primary
9	1	3	Married	Masters	Middle Manager	Primary
10	2	2, 4	Married	Degree	Senior Manager	Dual Breadwinning Couple
11	1	4	Married	Post Graduate Certificate	Professional	Dual Breadwinning Couple
12	3	7,16, 20	Married	A Levels	Manager	Primary
13	1	9	Divorced (engaged)	Higher National Certificate	Officer	Dual Breadwinning Couple
14	1	12	Single	Degree	Officer	Sole earner
15	2	5,8	Married	Post Grad Diploma	Senior Manager	Primary
16	2	13,18	Married	Degree	Professional	Dual Breadwinning Couple
17	3	2, 7,13	Married	Diploma	Middle Manager	Primary Earner
18	1	10	Married	GCSE	Officer	Primary
19	3	2 x 9, 12	Divorced (living with partner)	Degree	Middle Manager	Dual Breadwinning Couple
20	3	9,12,17	Married	Masters	Senior Manager	Dual Breadwinning Couple
21	2	10,14	Married	Degree	Senior Manager	Primary
22	1	4	Married	Degree	Senior Manager	Secondary
23	1	1	Married	Degree	Manager	Primary
24	2	10,13	Married	Higher National Diploma	Officer	Primary
25	1	8	Single	Degree	Officer	Sole Earner
26	2	4,7	Married	Masters	Officer	Primary
27	7 (6 of them step children)	9,11,15, 16, 23,24, 25	Married	Higher National Certificate	Manager	Secondary
28	2	1,5	Married	Diploma in Management Studies	Senior Manager	Dual Breadwinning Couple
29	2	9,14	Married	Masters	Senior Manager	Dual Breadwinning Couple

The participants did not represent a random selection, they were offered interviews on a first-come first serve basis, having clarified that they met the research criteria. They were essentially 'self-selecting', having seen the request for volunteers they had selected and presented themselves. The sample of women could be described as a convenience sample, 'one that is simply accessible to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility'. (Bryman, 2001:97) It is recognised that whilst this is a speedy and inexpensive way of data collection there are limitations to convenience sampling in that there are no guarantees of representation of the total population.

I felt that after 29 interviews there was sufficient material to analyse and draw conclusions from and that there were significant patterns and trends emerging in responses. There were key and unexpected findings that had emerged from the early interviews and these findings were repeated throughout the course of the interviews. Information which supported existing literature was also consistently presented and there were no new lines of enquiry that I felt compelled to investigate. I was reassured by Glaser and Strauss (1967) cited in Cohen et al (2001:151) who suggest that,

'A researcher needs to know where to draw the line with their data collection and a good indication of when to do this where phenomena that have been observed before are consistently repeated'.

Unfortunately, several women were offered interviews where they fell slightly outside the criteria. This was because I didn't thoroughly check that the potential participant understood and met the criteria. Sue's youngest child had just turned 13 at the time of interview, she had not been clear about this until the actual interview. Dawn had gone back to work part-time until her daughter was 18 months, at which point she had returned full-time, this was not established until the interview. Mary worked 35 hours a week yet classified herself as a full-time worker, again this came out during the interview. Whilst these were minor details which were unlikely to have any significant impact on the findings, it was frustrating to have turned down women who fully met the criteria.

I conducted all the interviews myself and was keen to do this to ensure rigour and consistency in approach. Interviews lasted between 40 and 85 minutes with the average interview lasting for 63 minutes. During the interview I was mindful that I was responsible for the dynamics of the interview and of the need to pay attention to the 'interpersonal, interactional, communicative and emotional aspects' of the interview (Cohen, 2001:279). I was also conscious not to make any assumptions, just because I worked within the same organisation as the majority of participants. I was aware of the ethical dimension of interviewing and prior to approaching potential participants had drawn up a personal ethical code of practice (Appendix Seven) which was adapted from Reynolds (1979) in Cohen (2001:71). The code of practice served as a checklist and the ethical areas that I needed to adhere to were identified and mapped into sections:

approaching the potential participant; initial conversation with participant; prior to commencing interview; during the interview and after the interview. I kept one of these checklists for each participant to ensure I was conducting the process ethically throughout. Whilst I acknowledged that this could not predict all issues that may occur during the research process, it was hoped that it would help identify potential concerns and strategies for overcoming them, establish values and moral standards, raise awareness of my obligation to protect my research subjects and highlight any ethical factors and considerations. It also served as providing a transparent framework for considering my conduct at all times during the research process (Cohen et al 2001).

Interviews were recorded using an Olympus Digital Recorder, VN2100PC. Computer software (Olympus DSS Player) was used to copy the recordings to the computer. Mishler (1986) cited in Cohen et al (2001:281) suggests that 'the audiotape is selective and filters out important contextual factors, neglecting the visual and non-verbal aspects of the interview'. I was keen to record any non verbal reactions during the interview and immediately after the interview I made notes containing any observations and impressions, together with any notes about emerging themes and thoughts on further areas of study. This technique is supported by Mason (2002) who suggests that researchers need to make a record of observations, interpretations and experiences of the interview.

Transcribing

Initially I was planning on transcribing the interviews myself. However due to the time limitations and pressures of work this was not possible. I investigated a number of transcription services and decided upon a local lady who had experience of transcribing for doctoral theses. The sound wave files were emailed to the lady who transcribed the interviews and then emailed the transcripts to the researcher as Microsoft Word Documents. The accuracy of the transcription was excellent and the lady only had to check a small number of technical and unfamiliar terms. There were no changes made at this stage.

Data Analysis

It is acknowledged in the literature that one of the main challenges that qualitative research presents is the large amount of data that is collected, often in an unwieldy form such as interview transcripts (Bryman, 2001; Cohen 2001). A significant amount of data was collected from the 29 interviews conducted, in the form of interview transcription scripts and a method to order and make sense of the data was required. A separate script was used for each participant, which enabled notes to be made whilst the interview was being recorded. These notes contained anything that was considered significant, worthy of highlighting or contributed to any themes that were emerging. In addition any non-verbal cues were recorded.

The researcher followed, to a certain extent, the process of data analysis detailed by Cohen et al (2001:148),

1. 'Establish units of analysis of the data, indicating how these units are similar to and different from each other
2. Create a 'Domain analysis'
3. Establish relationships and linkages between the domains
4. Make speculative inferences
5. Summarise
6. Seek negative and discrepant cases
7. Theory generation'.

Initially, I read through each script without marking it but jotting down thoughts regarding how a systematic and simple coding system could be devised.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) cited in Cohen et al (2001:149) propose that,

'The first activity in analysing data is to read and re read the data to become thoroughly familiar with them, noting also any interesting patterns, any surprising, puzzling or unexpected features, any apparent inconsistencies or contradictions'.

It was important to get an overall personal profile of each participant. This was straightforward as it involved extracting data from the initial interview questions which elicited factual and short responses. A table was devised for recording

data and data was extracted from each transcript. This served as the fuller profile of participants. (Appendix Eight)

A colour was then assigned to all the themes that had emerged during the interviews. The codes were descriptive and thematic and the categories emerged from the initial reading and analysis of scripts and were not pre-determined. Reading carefully through the transcripts for the second time, the text was colour coded both manually and also electronically on the computer. See Figure 3.2, on the next page, for an example of electronic colour coding. This example shows that Jane's quote on motivating factors in orange text would be copied into the electronic folder on 'dependence on salary'. The second quote on motivating factors, in lavender text, will be transferred to the 'motivation to work full-time' folder. The quote in green regarding ambitions would be transferred into a folder entitled 'ambitions' but also into folders entitled, 'work-life balance', 'career pathways' and 'priorities'.

Figure 3.2. Example of electronic colour coding on script

Extract from Jane's Transcript

RM The next question is what motivates you to work full time? You have started to answer that is there anything else you would like to add?

Int **It's not financial because I could go part time.** But now I know that I can't do as much as I want to do I am probably spending a little bit more on me and I have been spending it on my treatment. So it has come in handy. But I don't want to spend it on the treatment all the time. I want to spend it on, you know, what I want to spend it on you know, different things. **So it's hard but.... no I don't come to work because it's just financial. It's for me getting me out.**

RM Are you ambitious within your work?

Int **I try to be, yeah, I try to be. I am not overly ambitious. I don't think oh I want to be ... I don't really want to get any higher than what I am now. I am quite happy with where I am. I don't want to go that step further because then that would be Head of the Service and I just don't want that because the children do come first. There's no doubt about it. They come first and I can handle what I am doing now as well as being a working mum. Yeah. I am ambitious to what I've got. I've worked my way up, I've done all my studying and I've got to where I want to get and I wouldn't want to move back where I lived doing what I'm doing because it's totally different.** The jobs are different, the gradings are different. I like my travel because I travel to work and sort of forget about home. Then on my way home I am travelling home and I forget about work. You know, I know I have probably contradicted that when I have got things on my mind, but I know that when I get home and they are in bed then I might think about work again. But at that time I think no, you go through that door and you treat them and everything's back to normal.

Key - colour by category

Dependence on Salary
Motivation to work full-time
Ambition
Work life Balance
Priorities
Career pathways

In addition, themed electronic folders were set up and elements of the text that were significant to the research were copied from the transcript and pasted in the relevant folder. The piece of text copied was labelled with the participant's pseudonym, at this point, to ensure the process of anonymity was established from the start. A folder was also created for significant elements of the transcript which didn't fit into a particular theme, to ensure these weren't lost. See Figure 3.3 below for an example of quotes saved in the electronic folder 'Ambition'.

The quotes have been labelled with the interviewee's pseudonym and the other folders that the quote was placed in was identified for cross-referencing.

Figure 3.3. Example of coding within the electronic folder 'Ambition'

<p>RM Are you ambitious within your work?</p> <p>Int I try to be, yeah, I try to be. I am not overly ambitious. I don't think oh I want to be ... I don't really want to get any higher than what I am now. I am quite happy with where I am. I don't want to go that step further because then that would be Head of the Service and I just don't want that because the children do come first. There's no doubt about it. They come first and I can handle what I am doing now as well as being a working mum. Yeah. I am ambitious to what I've got. I've worked my way up, I've done all my studying and I've got to where I want to get and I wouldn't want to move back where I lived doing what I'm doing because it's totally different. (Quote also in career pathways, work-life balance and priorities)</p> <p>RM Are you ambitious within your work?</p> <p>Int If you're talking about ambition that I want to move up the greasy pole and have more responsibility etcetera, etcetera, not in that way. If you are talking about ambition that I want to know more, I want to learn more, and I want to be better at my job, then yes because the next stage up for me is I start looking at management and then that takes me away from looking at archaeology and looking at buildings and the things I love so yes in one way, and no in another. (Quote also in motivation to work full-time and career pathways)</p>	J a n e
	L e a n n e

During this process the transcripts were cross referenced with the notes made both during and following the interviews. Where anything of significance occurred, notes were typed into the word documents and highlighted in a different colour next to the pseudonym. When the coding process had been completed I went about determining meaning from the cluster of themes. At this stage some of the coding needed cross referencing and fitted under more than one theme. For example, data regarding career progression often fitted under career pathways, career ambition, work-life balance and organisational culture. This was tackled by noting by the side of the text which other sections it had been placed in. This helped not only establish findings which cut across various themes but also would eventually help avoid the repetition of quotations when writing up the work. All themes were read through and a summary was produced of what had emerged from the themes. In this way I was able to identify themes common to all or most of the interviews, such as importance of the woman's salary in the household and the prevalence of house husbands.

In addition, patterns that were developing such as the 3 categories of Work Life Balance and themes which were unique to a single or minority of interviews were recorded. By re-reading the summaries, I was able to make sense of the impact of some of the smaller findings, which pieced together contributed to one of the main research finding around glass ceilings.

Verifying

Reliability can be viewed as the extent to which a reoccurring procedure produces consistent results under the same conditions. Cohen et al (2001:121) suggest,

‘The most practical way of achieving greater validity in interviews is to minimise the amount of bias as much as possible. The sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent, and the substantive content of the questions’.

As I was the sole interviewer the variables were minimalised regarding the consistency of interaction. Cohen et al (2001:125) comment that,

‘Previous studies have indicated that the biography of the interviewer including gender, race, religion, status, social class and age can act as sources of bias, sometimes termed to as interviewer effects’.

In terms of balance, due to the required criteria of the target group of women, I matched the criteria entirely. At the beginning of the interview, I explained fully my own background and reasons for interests in the research subject. There was minimal obvious variation in terms of age, race, social class and status between myself and the participants, however I felt this helped establish a relationship and develop a rapport with participants. In terms of the questions, the questionnaire was piloted to ensure the questions were clear and weren’t

open to misinterpretation. As previously described, I had been mindful throughout the interview to give all participants the opportunity to share information. However, by the nature of using semi-structured interviews there were always going to be variables in responses.

In the majority of cases the interviews ran relatively smoothly. There were 3 interviews that were slightly less successful than others, although nothing occurred which had a significant impact on the validity or reliability of data captured. Caroline's interview was carried out in a meeting booth in the work restaurant due to a double booking of a meeting room. Whilst this appeared to have no impact on the response of the participant and the booth was fairly private there was a small amount of noise interference in the background. Laura's interview was carried out in her home due to her daughter being poorly. This meant there was an 18 month baby present during the interview who was amazingly well behaved. In addition, her husband walked in at the end of the interview. If he had walked in earlier the dynamics of the interview and the responses could have been very different. Finally, during Leanne's interview the recording had to be paused when we were interrupted with coffee and biscuits. I was unable to restart the digital recorder and had to start a new interview which meant that whilst data was not lost, the interview and transcript were in two parts.

Reporting

I communicated with all participants using their own names but they were all ensured that their responses would be anonymous in the finished work. To ensure not only the names of the participants but also the names of their partners and children remained anonymous, a system was devised where everyone was allocated a pseudonym which was used during the writing up stage. For reasons of anonymity the real names have been omitted. (Appendix Nine)

The research operated under the British Sociological Association's Guidelines of Research Practice and Ethics and the University of Leicester's Research Code of Conduct. All participants were sent an informed consent letter (Appendix Four) and an informed consent form (Appendix Five) to read and sign prior to the interview. It was important to me that the participants had read and understood this prior to the interview and were given an opportunity to ask any questions before signing the form. They were also given their own copy of the form. The issue of re-iterating anonymity was viewed as particularly important in this study, due to being an internal researcher. Hart and Bond (1995:199) confirm how important an understanding of the protocol or consent form is prior to the interview taking place.

'It is not sufficient for the interviewer simply to read it (the protocol) out and then expect the respondent to sign....The respondent might justifiably feel anxious about signing anything, particularly at an early

stage when the interviewer may be unknown to him or her. In our view it would be better to give the respondent time to read and re-read the protocol for himself or herself at his or her own pace and to negotiate any additions or changes to it with the researcher. We would also recommend that the respondent should give a signed copy of the form as a record'.

Prior to the interview participants were also informed that they had a right to withdraw at any stage of the process. Following the interview participants were informed that confidential storage of the data was guaranteed. All electronic data was held securely in password protected files and paper documentation in a locked filing cabinet.

Limitations

Whilst I feel that this study was extremely successful, I believe that it has limitations in a number of areas. The fact that the majority of women (26 out of 29) worked for Lincolnshire County Council places limitations on the breadth and scope of this piece of research. At the outset, it was not anticipated that this would be the case. However, as previously, discussed the logistics of interviewing Lincolnshire County Council employees, as opposed to other women, resulted in this being the case. However, what materialised was a focused study on women mainly working for a local authority which produced some key findings and is valuable in its own right.

Another limitation of this research is the sampling method used to identify participants and the connection I had with all women approached. This led, I believe, to potential participants from the nursery where I was a parent being reluctant to engage in the interview process due to apprehension regarding the nature of the interview process and questions asked. Due to the sole method of data collection being through qualitative research interviews, I was not able to offer potential participants another method to share their experiences, perhaps anonymously, through a less intimate route.

Time was a limiting factor during this research. The sole method of data collection was through qualitative research interviews and I had to reduce the number of interviews carried out considerably from the number originally planned. Whilst I felt that 29 interviews provided me with sufficient evidence to draw conclusions, ideally I would have increased the number of interviews carried out.

Conclusion

I found Kvale's model of Seven Stages of an Interview Investigation extremely helpful in structuring my methodology. Clear themes and avenues for enquiry arose from the literature review which were helpful in designing a focused piece of research. An interpretivist paradigm was identified as the most appropriate approach for this study, as I needed to undertake a detailed study exploring experiences, feelings and views of the target group. Qualitative interviews were used as the sole method of collecting data within this study. As

my profile was extremely similar to that of the target group I had to consider the implications this would have during the interview process. This appeared to have a positive effect, enabling a relationship to be established quickly and a rapport to be developed during the interview.

Convenience sampling proved to be of mixed success. Due to trying to access research participants who knew me, I believe I alienated some of the potential participants due to fear of disclosing personal information in an intimate setting. This led the study down a slightly different path which resulted in a much more focused piece of research with the majority of women being employed by Lincolnshire County Council. This again had ethical implications, as an inside researcher, I was acutely aware of my duty to protect research subjects and ensure anonymity at all times.

The interview process went well, as did the transcriptions and analysis of data. The method of analysis, whilst simple was effective and enabled data to be categorised but not restricted or pigeon holed into pre-determined categories. Whilst I recognise that there are limitations to the research, I believe that this is a valuable study which not only presents key findings but also adds weight to the existing literature in a number of areas.

The next chapter will start to consider the findings from the data captured in this study.

Chapter 4 An exploration of factors which enable professional women to pursue a career full-time and bring up their children.

Introduction

Chapter 2 outlined key literature pertinent to the research question and helped to identify a focus for the research. This research set out to establish what enables professional women to continue to both pursue their careers full-time and bring up children. As highlighted in the introductory chapter, this research makes three valuable and key contributions to research in this field.

1. It provides a sound challenge to Hakim's preference theory, regarding the concept of preference and choice and categorisation of women.
2. It identifies the variables which enable a woman to pursue a career full-time and bring up children.
3. It proposes the concept that women constantly navigate conflicting demands to enable them to cope with working full time and bringing up their children.

In addition there are a number of other significant findings that are unique to this piece of research and / or add weight to existing literature in this subject area. The findings are arranged into areas that provide evidence for me to be able to substantiate the significance of this research and the value of the findings.

Chapter Four will start by considering the evidence which contributes towards the first key finding - a sound challenge to Hakim's preference theory, regarding the concept of preference and choice and categorisation of women. It will consider the dependence on the woman's earnings as the primary source of income in the family. The chapter will discuss the significance of the woman's salary within the family and will then consider the reasons behind the woman's decision to work full-time, looking at whether there were any other options considered and identifying if there had been a choice available for the women. The chapter will explore what motivates these women to work full-time, in addition to bringing up a young family.

Having established that the majority of women interviewed need to earn a full-time income, the chapter then goes on to answer the research question, considering the key factors which enable a woman to work full-time in a professional role and bring up children. This chapter will consider the impact of government policy, legislation and organisations on enabling women to bring up their children and pursue a full-time career. The importance of organisational flexibility will be considered in detail. The link between women's educational qualifications and their return to work full-time following motherhood will be explored. The size and make-up of a family unit will be discussed, identifying whether numbers of children and age gaps between them have any impact on a mother's ability to work-full-time. The sources of support a woman has access to including the support of a partner, childcare and domestic help will be explored in detail. The emergence of a significant finding - the prevalence of

house husbands, who act as an enabling factor for mothers to return to work full-time, will be a key focus for discussion. Having explored and discussed all these contributory key elements, the chapter will then conclude with a summary of key findings that have emerged from this study and an overview of other 'enabling factors' which add weight to literature already in existence.

Finances and Return to Work

The literature review identified that for some women returning to work full time is a choice and for others due to financial circumstances, it may be the only option. The importance of financial considerations is highlighted by Hudson et al (2004:77) whose research indicates that,

‘The length of maternity leave entitlement is far less important than the length of maternity pay, in return timing decisions from maternity leave. For example, 72 per cent of mothers in 2002 did not take their full leave quota, claiming they could not afford to remain out of work unpaid for that long’.

The women interviewed were initially asked a question about how important their salary was to them and their families. Out of 29 women, 21 women reported it to be very important and 8 reported it was important to maintain a lifestyle. The majority of women identified their salary as being essential in supporting their families. As 16 out of the 29 women interviewed classified themselves as primary or sole breadwinners and 9 described themselves as part of a Dual Breadwinning Couple, it is not surprising that this question evoked a passionate response. A number of women had taken the primary or

sole earning role which enabled their partners to take responsibility for childcare, as 'house husbands'. These women and lone parents responded quickly and concisely with responses such as, 'crucial', 'very', 'If I don't get it, we don't eat', 'We could not survive without it', 'Without it we just wouldn't manage' and 'fundamental'. These responses were articulated strongly and, at times, with a sense of desperation, as they acknowledged the responsibility they had for providing the family income. The responses were consistent with Hakim (2000) who suggests that it is more likely that a woman will return to work full-time following motherhood if she is the primary earner in the family.

The responses from women who classified themselves as being part of a Dual Breadwinning Couple referred to the incomes of both individuals as being essential to maintain a standard of living or commitments that couples have. This is consistent with Warren (2004:3) who recognises 'the growing need for two incomes to maintain material living standards'.

Jenny, part of a dual breadwinning couple, is typical of a number of women who explained that they needed to work to maintain a lifestyle they had become accustomed to.

'Well I think it is in terms of you know sort of the mortgage that we've got and the property that we've got, the car, and our lifestyle..... I think it's what you get used to isn't it, and I think if anything it would be nice to go up rather than go down'.

(Jenny, mother to George 14 and Adam 10)

A key theme which emerged from the research is how critical the salary earned is to the majority of women interviewed. A significant but unanticipated finding, which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter, is the surprising number of women who were the sole or primary earners in the households and consequently the number of households who had 'house husbands' at home, which enabled women to work full-time.

In the early stages of the interview, women were asked to classify themselves in terms of the type of earner they were within the family unit. Out of 29 women interviewed, 2 described themselves as the sole earner, 14 as the primary earner, 9 as being part of a dual breadwinning couple and 4 as a secondary earner. Crompton and Geran (1995:3) identified this trend from research undertaken in Canada and found that,

'The proportion of dual-earner couples where the wife earns more than the husband has risen from 11% in 1967 to 24% in 1995. The rise in the proportion of sole-earner couples with the wife as the earner has made a more steady and dramatic increase over this time period...This has meant that the proportion of sole-earner households where the woman is the wage earner has increased from 2% in 1967 to of 20% in 1995, an increase of 18% over 29 years'.

The findings from Crompton and Geran (1995) are in line with the findings from this research, although the prevalence of sole or primary earners was unanticipated. This could possibly be due to the fact that all but 3 women employed were working for the local authority. As a large family friendly employer, the local authority may well attract women looking to work in a

supportive environment who recognise that, not only has the organisation got the right policies in place, but it is well placed to enable the policies to be implemented effectively. This was voiced by a number of women including Mary,

‘It is partly that the organisation LCC has got some really good policies around flexible working and supporting, not just parents but anybody in the workplace to be a bit more flexible.... they (management) have been just incredibly accommodating to what I ever had before and that makes a really big difference to me I think’.

(Mary, mother to Archie 3)

Lincolnshire County Council’s Gender Profile (2010) shows that at the end of March 2010, 67.62 % of employees were female and 32.38% of employees were male. Whilst it has not been possible to get any specific statistics to confirm speculation that Lincolnshire County Council attracts full-time working mothers, particularly those who depend upon the income, the majority of women interviewed were forthcoming regarding the support they received from the Local Authority.

At the research design stage, it was anticipated that government legislation and / or policy may have the capacity to have a significant impact on a mother’s ability to work full time and bring up children. The chapter will now explore to what extent this is the case. The table on the next page shows the number of

women who were able to benefit from some of the key elements that have arisen from the government's attempts to promote family friendly employment.

Table 4.1. Numbers of Women Accessing Benefits arising from Government Legislation

Benefit	Flexitime / Flexible Working	Work from Home	Working Families Tax Credit (Childcare)	Nursery Education Funding	Company childcare vouchers
No of women	Yes (26) No (3)	Yes (26) No (3)	Yes(14) No (5) Unsure (10)	Yes (13) No (5) Unsure (11)	Yes(3) No (15) Unsure (11)

Whilst women were not asked for an indication of their annual income, the financial situation of interviewees is reflected in the number who had been able to benefit from the childcare element of Working Families Tax Credits, at least 14 out of 29 women. This tax credit is aimed at supporting low to middle income households. The financial implications of the childcare element of Working Families Tax Credits, Nursery Education Funding and Company Childcare Vouchers, were viewed by some as helpful, but none of these benefits were seen as financial 'enablers' in supporting a woman to work full-time and bring up children. This would imply that, as discussed previously, all women needed to work financially so would have returned to work regardless of the financial incentives, benefits or support that were available to them.

As Ruth points out,

‘It all helps and when your child is 3 and you get funding, it’s a real bonus but I needed to work anyway and my mind wasn’t made up by the funding that was available’.

(Ruth, mother to Mimi 4)

The majority of women were pressurised into returning to work full-time before the end of their maternity leave for financial reasons. Samantha came back to work early due to financial pressures.

‘I only took 3 months with each child. Because of the financial situation I came back to work’.

(Samantha, mother to Carla 5 and Sam 18 months)

The fact that the majority of women were not taking advantage of their full entitlement to unpaid maternity leave, due to financial reasons, is inconsistent with Burgess et al (2002) whose survey found that professional and managerial women were more likely to take advantage of unpaid leave. However, when examining the women’s financial situations or positions within the family unit this inconsistency is explained. Establishing early in the interview that many families were dependent upon the woman’s income gave a potential insight into the reasons behind women working full-time and raised the question of motivation and choice.

Working Full-Time - Preference or Not? A Challenge to Hakim

The chapter will now examine whether women had the opportunity to explore any options other than working full-time, following motherhood. It has already been established that the majority of these women depend on a full-time income in order to support their families. During the interview women were asked if they had considered other options before returning to work full-time. Significantly, out of all the women who went back to work full-time following motherhood, for none of these had returning to work part-time been a consideration. This sets the findings in the context of the fact that all women who were interviewed were committed to full-time work and therefore needed to make it work for their families and themselves. In all but two interviews, financial reasons were cited as the determining factor for returning to work full-time. There was no alternative for these women, without considering a major change in lifestyle. Caroline shares how she had no options available to her, other than working full-time, as she had made the decision to return to work as the sole breadwinner, due to her family situation.

‘So before I even had children I said to my husband, I earned more than him, if you do want more children the only way we would agree this is if you wanted to stay at home and bring the children up because obviously I can earn a lot more money than you. He agreed to that and therefore I was always the one who was going to go back to work. So full time it was. Then once that decision has been made there has been absolutely

no opportunity to reverse that. My husband has been out of the workplace now for 4 years and there is no way you can step back in now at anywhere near what I could so the choice has now gone'.

(Caroline, mother to Tania, 17, Harry, 3 and Lucy 2)

Perceptions around full-time working, as opposed to part-time working, were mentioned in some capacity by most women. The lack of part-time job opportunities at a management level emerged as a common theme. Dianne, like others, believed that there was little in the way of part-time work in her field as a Project Manager.

'I've always worked full time. I've never considered working part time. I think with the position that I'm in there really isn't anything available for part time working. It's a full time position.

(Dianne, Mother to Steve, 20, Lucy 16 and Henry 7)

This is consistent with the literature which identifies resistance from managers to offer senior opportunities in a part-time capacity. Yeandle et al (2005:14) in their study into women and part-time work found that,

'Managers were generally resistant to the idea of part-time working at the senior level, arguing that the content of senior jobs required a full-time worker. Employing part-time workers in these posts would, it was believed, lead to a situation where uncompleted tasks would fall to other managers, and other workers, to complete'.

Connolly and Gregory (2008:54) believe that this approach is preventing many women working at their potential. They found that,

‘Downgrading is particularly severe among women in managerial positions, 29% or more of corporate managers move down the occupational ladder, two-thirds to clerical jobs and the remaining third to a range of low skill jobs.’

This viewpoint is supported by Yeandle et al (2005:9) who found that,

‘55% of women working in low paid, part-time jobs were working below their potential. Some women had moved into low-grade, part-time jobs because of the intensity of work in senior level, full-time jobs and because of the absence of effective work-life balance policies and practices within workplaces’.

There was a sense amongst all women in this current study that, in order for them to maintain their existing career level or progress within their chosen field, they needed to work full-time. Doreen, a senior nurse when she had her first child, spoke of how she felt that she had to return to work full-time to maintain her existing position and progress within her career.

‘But again the level then of seniority of the jobs I was in at that time I felt that I needed to work full time in order to fulfil the level of responsibility

and I didn't want to go back in my career. I wanted to maintain my seniority'.

(Doreen, mother to Rachel 14 and Naomi 9)

A number of women spoke about how it was easier to work full-time in a professional field. Jane, a senior Human Resources Officer, identified the practicalities of working full-time as opposed to part-time, especially when dealing with people.

'In the field, in the profession that we're dealing with, it is quite hard to leave HR work and when you're doing cases and things like that just working part time you say "right I can't talk to you for another week because I am off now until next Monday" and you can't do that. It depends what job you're in whether you can solely do it part time and if I were a person that probably can't switch off as well as some people I found it easier to actually go back full time'.

(Jane, mother to Lily 5 and Bertie 3)

Having identified that part-time work was not an option for the women interviewed, they were asked if they would prefer to work part-time if circumstances allowed. Significantly, out of the mothers in this study who spoke about there being no choice regarding returning to work in a full-time capacity, there appeared to be a clear divide between those who would like to work part-time and those who wouldn't. This provides a challenge to Hakim's preference theory and her classification of categories of female employees. Firstly, the

women in this study are not able to fulfil their preference with regard to choosing between full-time and part-time work, they are having to engage in full-time work due to their financial circumstances.

‘I would have liked to have worked part time. I would have liked to have taken longer than the minimum maternity leave but I became a single parent at five months pregnant so there was no options’.

(Christine, mother to Claire 12)

Secondly, the categories of work-centred and adaptive and the descriptions of these types of women can be challenged. Hakim (2000) describes work centred women as those who prioritise full-time work in their lives and if they choose to have children they will not be a woman’s priority in life. She describes adaptive women as those who endeavour to combine paid employment with domestic and family responsibilities, usually in the form of part-time work and their engagement in work is not along the lines of pursuing a career. The majority of women in this study do not sit in either of these categories. Whilst they all work full-time pursuing careers, only 4 out of 29 of the women suggest that their work takes priority over their family. Whilst a number of the women expressed a preference to work part-time, if circumstances allowed, they did not suggest that this would mean giving up their career.

This research challenges Hakim, questioning the reality that all women are able to follow their preferences and that they can be categorised according to the number of hours they work and the priority they place on work and family life.

What motivates women to work full-time (other than the salary)?

The next section explores factors, other than finance, which motivate women to work full-time. Having established that working anything other than full-time was not an option considered by any of the women, and in the majority of cases this was due to financial circumstances, the next step was to explore other factors which motivated women to work full-time and raise a family. The open question elicited a variety of responses and the women, in some cases, moved away from the financial constraints they had initially referred to and spoke about other factors. There was evidence of genuine pleasure that women gained from their positions. Leanne, a lone parent, enthused about her job,

‘My job is absolutely brilliant. There is no better job. I do a wonderful thing. I get to do what I want to do and I get paid for it and this job is full time. I get up in the morning and I enjoy doing this job.

(Leanne, mother to Daisy 8)

In addition, a number of women spoke of the impact that work had on their self-esteem and the satisfaction they gained from working full-time. This is in line with the literature which suggests that there is a strong correlation between job involvement and self-esteem. Cortis and Cassar (2005:5) suggest ‘job involvement and work-based self-esteem are positively correlated’.

Carrie spoke about work giving her an identity other than being a mother.

‘Self esteem, it’s something other than a mum, and obviously mum’.

(Carrie, mother to Matthew 9)

In a number of cases, women spoke about being able to give their children opportunities that they didn’t have when they were young. Jenny spoke passionately about the opportunities she could give her children access to by working full-time.

‘I think it’s about sort of quality of life for my children, giving them the best possible opportunities that they can have while they are growing and obviously some of those opportunities weren’t available to myself. So I work hard to ensure those opportunities so they like sport, they like theatre, you know all these sorts of things. I mean term time its £124 a term for the theatre one. You know, my son’s going on a rugby school tournament and its £2,000’.

(Jenny, mother to George 14 and Adam 10)

A number of reasons for working full-time, other than the income it provides, emerged during the interviews. However, the dependence on the woman’s earnings as the primary source of income in the family was the most dominant message. The vast majority of women needed to return to work full-time for financial reasons. This was not a choice or the preferred option for many, hence providing a sound challenge to Hakim’s Preference Theory.

What are the Enabling Factors?

Having set the context by asking women a number of questions around the reasons for working full-time, the interview schedule was drawn up in order to try and ascertain answers to the research question, 'What enables a woman to pursue a full-time career and bring up children?'. The chapter will now go on to explore enabling factors grouped into three themes, which arose from the literature, which are organisational flexibility, personal circumstances and support from outside the immediate family. A key finding that emerged directly in response to the research question is the prevalence of house husbands who enable women to work full-time and bring up children. Other findings which will be discussed make significant contributions in supporting other research which has been carried out in this field.

Organisational Flexibility

Flexible working is viewed by women as critical in enabling them to work full-time and bring up children. The term flexible working for the purpose of this research is a full-time job with flexible working hours. This is sometimes known as flexi-time which enables employees to choose when they work, although there's usually a core period during which they have to work. A flexible day at Lincolnshire County Council means that a standard working day of 7 hours and 24 minutes could be worked in the following ways. An employee is able to work within the band time of 07.30 and 18.30, as long as they are working within the core hours of between 09.30-11.45 and 14.30-15.15. All hours worked must be

recorded to the nearest 5 minutes and during a settlement period of four weeks, an employee is able to carry forward up to 8 hours or take in advance up to 4 hours. (Lincolnshire County Council, 2010)

Being able to benefit from flexible working is often seen as a key factor which will support women in returning to work full-time following the birth of their children. However, from the literature review it was difficult to determine whether access to flexible working has contributed towards an increase in mothers participating in the labour market. Although the Labour Force Survey collects information about flexible working arrangements, respondents are not asked whether these working arrangements have affected their ability to participate in work.

An important finding from this current research is the evidence of the importance of flexible working in enabling women to work full-time and bring up children. Flexitime or flexible working was used by the majority of women interviewed. The benefits of being able to work flexibly were apparent in all those who used it. Flexible working was described as 'great', 'priceless', 'worth a fortune', 'absolutely critical'. Table 4.1 located earlier in the chapter shows that 26 out of 29 women interviewed were able to take advantage of flexible working.

The benefits of flexible working were recognised across the board, at all levels and both from lone mothers and those who were living with a partner. In a number of cases, women specifically identified the ability to work flexibly as enabling them to pursue a full time professional career and bring up children. Stephanie speaks for most of the women when she says,

‘Flexible diary helps without a doubt. I couldn’t do it if I had to... I couldn’t work as well as I do if I didn’t have that flexibility’.

(Stephanie, mother to Craig 18 and Peter 13)

Lone parents, particularly, relied upon the ability to work flexibly to ‘cope’ with balancing children with a career. Christine speaks of how she practically uses the Flexible Working Hours Scheme.

‘Flexible working is fairly priceless. Quite often with children you need half an hour off here or there at one end of the day. I don’t think people at work realise just how good it is that if you do have to say I’m sorry I’ve got to go ... its fine okay and will you make up the hours. I have either got flex in the bank or it’s going to put me in a minus but I will make it up over the next couple of weeks. That is worth a fortune’.

(Christine, lone mother to Claire 12)

Where flexible working wasn’t seen as absolutely critical to being able to balance a family and a career, it was viewed as a way that mothers could make themselves more accessible to their children for sports days, meetings and appointments and occasionally dropping off and collecting from school. Silvia speaks about how she uses flexible working to enable her to be with her children, occasionally, during traditional working hours.

'I mean say for instance I went home early last week to go and watch some of their swimming lessons you know. So it's really nice to be able to go at a quarter past three you know, and I can do that. Yeah. So I do use it like that. If it's a parents' assembly I can go in, come in late.... which is really handy'.

(Silvia, mother to Daniel 7 and Ricky 4)

In the vast majority of cases, flexible working was used to 'cope' with being a working mother and the time was used to balance life. A small minority of women in more senior positions struggled to use the benefits of flexitime due to fully booked diaries and they intimated that although their companies supported flexible working, they weren't comfortable using it at their level.

Having the ability to work from home can be seen as providing flexibility to women in order to support them in working full-time and bringing up children. Lincolnshire County Council has a Homeworking Policy and Homeworking Guidance for Employees. (Lincolnshire County Council, 2010) The policy and guidance detail both informal and formal homeworking arrangements within the authority. Phizacklea et al (2001:228) hypothesised that 'women with childcare responsibilities are more likely to work at home in order to juggle and meet the demands of all aspects of their lives'. Evidence presented, as a result of their research (2001:228) suggested that 'women who work mainly at home are more likely to report having dependent children than women who work elsewhere'.

Working from home, whilst accessible to the majority of women in this research, was not cited as being as valuable as flexible working. This is reflected in a recent online poll (<http://www.workingmums.co.uk>, 2008) which suggested only 54% of mums would prefer the ability to work from home, compared to 85% who would prefer flexible hours. The majority of women in this study were able to work from home but did not regularly take advantage of this during working hours. Most acknowledged that additional work was undertaken at home in their own time. The lack of uptake of working from home was due to a number of reasons, including an inappropriate environment at home, the perceived need to be visible within the workplace and the practicalities around the role they were in. There were a number of women whose husbands / partners were the full or part-time carers for their children and this prevented them from working from home effectively. This included Caroline,

‘I could work from home but I can’t. I’ve got two young children there. It’s like a zoo’.

(Caroline, mother to Tanya, 17, Harry 3 and Lily 2)

There was also a feeling amongst a number of women that they were uncomfortable with not being visible within the workplace. The need to be permanently visible during the working day is linked in the literature to a conscientious and committed employee who is dedicated both to the organisation and his or her career. McDonald et al (2008:2198) suggest previous research shows ‘strong links between the constant visibility associated with full-time, standard employment and available career opportunities’. The

authors (2008:2198) cite Sheridan (2004) who 'labels this phenomenon of constant visibility in the workplace and its association with career success as chronic presenteeism'. Dianne was one of the women who preferred to be seen on a daily basis, as she was concerned about her reputation as a contracted Project Manager.

'I suppose I could work from home. But in some cases I feel I need to be here just in case, just being cautious. I think with being a contractor it's quite difficult as well because you don't want people to think you are taking advantage'.

(Dianne, mother to Steve, 20, Charlotte 16, Henry, 7)

However, in a couple of specific cases the company's policies around home working were invaluable and enabled several women to work full-time and bring up children. Jane has a disability which means she often suffers from extreme pain, especially if she has to move frequently and drive.

'I work two days from home. That is because I've got a disability. So, to cut down the travel because I live an hour away.... I've got a Citrix Connection, I've got a mobile phone, I've got a laptop, everything I need to work from home and it's just fantastic and I get more done'.

(Jane, mother to Lily, 5 and Bertie, 3)

Whilst the majority of women cited flexible working as critical in enabling them to bring up children and work full-time, there was also a consensus of

agreement that family friendly policies, including flexible working, were only effective if management believed in them and supported the implementation and use of them. There was a general recognition from all the women interviewed, who worked for the Local Authority, that they were in a fortunate position, as the council was large enough to be able to implement and support the policies. However, there were still references made to managers and colleagues that hadn't previously been supportive. There was also reference made to a perceived lack of flexibility in the private sector and it would be interesting, as a further piece of research, to conduct a comparative set of interviews within the private sector and identify any differences regarding the implementation of policies, the flexibility they provide and the attitudes of employers and employees towards working mothers.

The significance of personal circumstances

Having considered the impact that an organisation can have in enabling a woman to pursue a full-time career and bring up children, this chapter will now consider the impact of women's personal circumstances. The personal circumstances of the women are all different. The areas of personal circumstances that were explored during interviews were: educational background and qualifications; the size and make up of the family unit, meaning how many children a woman had and the age differences between children; the presence of a partner in the family unit and the support available from the partner. Discussion around this area led to one of the significant findings in this

research, which is the prevalence of 'house husbands' who act as an enabler for mothers to return to work full-time.

Is education an enabler?

The significance of a woman's qualifications in influencing her decision to return to work full-time in a professional role and bring up children was initially a key element of this research. Whilst it is recognised that qualifications cannot physically support a mother in returning to the workplace full-time, being qualified to a certain level may mean that it is easier for a woman to do so. Out of the 29 women interviewed, 7 had a Masters qualification, 2 had a post-graduate qualification, 11 had a degree or equivalent and 9 were qualified below degree level. This in itself is significant. The number of women with degree level qualifications or above was more than double those without. This compares favourably to previous research.

'The proportion of households with parents with degrees and children under age five who continued in full-time work is more than double amongst those with no educational qualification'. (Harkness, 2005:7-8)

Women were asked how significant their education / qualification was in their decision to continue working full-time following motherhood. Women, on the whole, struggled to answer this question directly and concisely. The question proved thought provoking. Women described the relationship between qualifications and working full-time as a 'driver', that they went 'hand in hand' and 'I think it's part of your toolkit'. Women with higher level qualifications

generally shared the view that they had put so much into getting their qualifications that they needed to use them in a full-time position. Suzanne was one of these women,

‘I suppose there is a... because I have invested so much into doing that I feel that I would like to get the benefit from having got the qualifications and again I suppose it’s.. there aren’t masses of opportunities at a senior level if you’re not prepared to work full time’.

(Suzanne, mother to Tim 17, Neil 12, Dominic 9, qualified to Masters level)

There were a number of women who recognised the importance of their qualifications but were undecided, even after deliberation, as to whether they were significant in enabling them to work full-time. Dawn was one of these.

‘I suppose it’s just not necessarily about whether you work full time or not, but if you had taken the conscious decision that you actually want to reach that level and put that dedication in and reach that level of education then you are probably going to want to do something with it and I suppose it leads you to perhaps a certain level of career. But whether that automatically means that you want to do that full time or not, I’m not sure to be honest because there are lots of professionally qualified senior people who, although they are qualified at a certain level, choose that they would rather take a career break and stay at home with

the kids for a while. I don't know. So I suppose it's not the single factor I would say that decides whether you work full time or not'.

(Dawn, mother to Molly 7, qualified to Degree level)

Several women, including Joanna, discussed the issue of qualifications enabling them to earn a higher wage, which in turn enabled them to afford childcare which enabled them to work full-time.

'Well that's obviously been massive, because obviously that's where finances come into it. When you go on, and I am sure you are going to talk about childcare later on, it is the ability to be able to do that. So the education has directed me in that way that I am able to do a higher paid job, you know, and it's part of that'.

(Joanna, mother to Rosie 12 and The Twins, 9 qualified to Degree Level)

The findings indicate that qualifications, whilst having an input into enabling a woman to reach a certain level, were not perceived by the majority of women as a key factor in enabling a woman to work full-time. One could argue that this research showed that being educated to a certain level does not specifically enable a woman to work full-time and bring up children, unless education has enabled the women to work at a level where she can afford to pay for childcare costs to support her working full-time. Instead, education is a driver, meaning that a woman who has invested heavily in her education will be driven to utilise the education and qualifications in a full-time position. Alternatively, where a woman has proven she has the drive to study and qualify at a certain level, she

possesses the same drive and determination to work full-time and bring up children.

The impact of the make up of the family unit

The chapter will now explore how the size and make-up of the family unit impacts on a woman's ability to work full-time and bring up children. Out of 29 women interviewed, 13 had 1 child, 9 had 2 children, 6 had 3 children and 1 had more than 3 children.

Smeaton and Marsh (2006:15) found that,

‘women who go on to have two or more children have significantly depressed work return rates after their first child.... a larger family size is an important predictor of job participation one year after first births’.

During interviews for this research, women were asked to explore how the size and make up of their families impacted upon their ability to work full-time. Having considered this, women were asked if they had consciously planned their families around their careers. The response to this question was interesting and thought provoking. Women with only one child were in the majority. Where women reported only having one child, there was no further probing around reasons for this or whether they were considering having any more children. However a number of women, including Nicola, volunteered information on this subject.

‘It’s enough coping with Lawrence and my job, I can just about stay on top, I think another child would tip me over the edge’.

(Nicola, mother to Lawrence 4)

Out of the seven women who had three or more children, three of these families consisted of at least one child from a previous relationship, resulting in age gaps of fourteen to fifteen years from the youngest to the oldest child. The following tables show both the minimum and maximum age gaps between respondents’ children.

Table 4.2. Table to show the minimum age gap between children, where women had more than one child

Min Age gap between children	0-1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-4 years	4-5 years	Over 5 years
No of responses	1	1	3	10	7	

Table 4.3. Table to show the maximum age gap between children, where women had more than one child

Max Age gap between children	0-1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-4 years	4-5 years	Over 5 years
No of responses			1	7	2	5

There was a mixed response to how the make-up (age gaps / ranges) of the family impacted on the woman's ability to work full-time. Where families had three or more children the response was more detailed, indicating the complications that having more children brought to a full-time working mother. These responses also indicated the benefits of having older children in the family to help with younger children. Frances has 15 years between her youngest and eldest.

'I think it actually has a positive impact because obviously the older children like I said... Kim, my eldest, she's 24. She's actually available to take the school runs and stuff. She's going to university. So she can do school runs and emergency pick-ups if I can't do it, which is actually quite good because I can never rely on my husband because he is away so much. So from that perspective it is quite a positive impact. You know,

she's brilliant with him at the end of the day. She's a big sister and it is a positive impact'.

(Frances, mother to George 9 and 5 step children)

Whilst there was an acknowledgement from women that the fewer children one had, the easier life was for a full-time working mother, there was an element of acceptance and perhaps a little regret from a few women that the need to work full time was limiting the expansion of their family. Silvia, the sole earner within the family shares her thoughts around expanding her family.

'I have got broody occasionally and thought it would be nice... but no I couldn't do it. I really don't think I've got the energy to do it now. I think it would, I think it would affect... well I don't know... yes I think it would affect my ability to do it, to keep on working full time. I don't know anyone with three kids who works full time'.

(Silvia, mother to Adie 7 and Ricky 4)

The findings around women limiting the size of their family, in order to balance working full time and bringing up children, would suggest that women impose their own constraints in order to manage their lives. This is significant in terms of the key finding discussed in the next chapter around women imposing their own constraints to cope with bringing up a family and pursuing a full-time career.

Sources of support

Sources of support available to women which may act as enabling factors will now be explored.

The impact of a partner's support

This section explores the difference that a partner can make in enabling a woman to work full-time and bring up children. In light of the findings, there will be a particular focus on the role of the house husband in enabling a woman to work full time and bring up children.

The literature suggests that a partner's attitudes, values, availability and willingness to support in terms of childcare and other domestic tasks acts as a key influence on a woman's decision to return to the workplace following motherhood (Debacker, 2008; Warren, 2007; Creighton, 1999). The presence of a partner and his attitudes, willingness and capacity to support his partner were therefore potentially identified as key in enabling a woman to work full-time and bring up children. Out of the 29 women interviewed, 23 were married, 3 were co-habiting, 4 were divorced and 2 were single. The prevalence of married women can be explained by Gattrell (2005:17) who identifies 'women who are married or co-habiting in a heterosexual relationship, as most likely to continue their career after childbirth'. A significant and unexpected finding from this research is that 8 out of the 29 women interviewed had a 'house husband'. This

also explains the earlier findings around the number of women who were sole or primary earners.

Wentworth and Chell (2000:642) cite Lutwin and Siperstein (1985) who explored the house husband role, their definition being,

‘Those husbands who actively are engaged in a role reversal with their wives. Consequently, the husbands are responsible for the primary care of the children and home while their wives are the principal wage earners’.

The prevalence of house husbands as an enabling factor was not considered during the literature review. Whilst there is plenty of on-line information available about the subject of house husbands, it has proved difficult to source much in the way of academic research and reliable and current literature on the number of house husbands and the model itself. A search of the following Databases: EBSCO Host, Emerald Fulltext, and Swetswise on 2nd March 2010 revealed very limited literature when searching for the terms ‘house husband’, ‘female breadwinner’, ‘male homemaker’ and ‘stay at home father’. However the internet provided some current information on the rise of the female breadwinner. Barrow (2010) posted an article entitled, ‘Rise of female breadwinners, as one in five women earn more than their partner.’ on the Financial Mail Women’s Forum. The article claims that, ‘Latest figures show that the number of breadwinner wives has rocketed to 19 per cent, equal to around 2.7 million women’. The figures were taken from a Government commissioned report published by the National Equality Panel (2010).

In addition, a number of newspaper articles have highlighted the trend of a growing number of house husbands including:

Appleyard, D. (2007) in the Daily Mail,

‘The phenomenon of the house husband is an increasingly popular one. The number of men deciding to become househusbands has increased by a staggering 83per cent since 1993. According to recent figures from the Office for National Statistics, there are more than 200,000 fathers in the UK choosing to give up their careers and raise their children at home’.

Grigg, C. (2009) in the Daily Telegraph,

‘The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics reveal that there are 192,000 house husbands in the UK, compared to 119,000 16 years ago’.

Whilst the data from online articles is slightly inconsistent, there does appear to be a trend in a significant increase in the number of house husbands and conversely, a decrease in ‘stay at home mums’ or housewives. ONS (2010) established a dramatic increase of 13.8% in male economic inactivity due to looking after family and home between 2008 and 2009 and a decrease of 2.6% in the number of women citing the same reason during the same period (See Table 4.4). The same bulletin showed a 28.1% increase in male claimant counts between January 2009 and January 2010. These figures would lead us to believe that the role of the father is changing, with more men staying at home to

look after the children, possibly due to females finding it easier to secure employment.

Table 4.4. Table to Show Economic Inactivity due to Looking after Family and Home for both Men and Women between 2008 and 2009

Date	Number of Men	Number of Women
October – December 2008	193,000	2,062,000
October – December 2009	220,000	2,009,000

ONS Statistical Bulletin (2010) www.ons.gov.uk

In this current research, in all cases, the house husband took responsibility for the childcare and, to a certain extent, domestic responsibilities within the household. In the majority of cases this was his sole role, and in several cases the house husband did this alongside retraining or a part-time job. In all cases, the husband provided support with childcare which enabled the woman to work full-time. Silvia explains how having a house husband enables her to work full-time,

‘It’s made it an awful lot easier because you know he’s there for the kids. He, if one of them is sick he can stay at home. He puts Adie on the bus and takes Ricky to nursery and then picks them up afterwards. Then if I need to go away on courses overnight he’s there to look after them. If he was working it would make it incredibly difficult for me to be as flexible as that. I just couldn’t’.

(Silvia, mother to Adie 7 and Ricky 4, married to House Husband Daniel)

This key finding indicates the potential decline of the male breadwinning model and suggests a significant shift in attitudes and approaches towards the gendered division of labour. In the families where the male was responsible for childcare, and to some extent the household, women did not report reluctance or resistance from their partners in taking this role within the family. It is, however, recognised that this is a one-sided view and the voices of the men have not been heard.

However, whilst these families had decided that a reverse in traditional gender roles worked in their situations, it was noted by more than one woman that her partner faced prejudice from other families. Negative reactions and other people's attitudes towards house husbands was raised by Caroline when she spoke about house husband Darren.

'I know he has said things like at first that they all look at me as if I'm a paedophile. He really strongly felt that, very much so. But they know him now and they say hello. But that's about it. There's no "ooh, would you care for a cup of coffee?" which a lot of mothers would do normally after dropping your children off at playgroup'.

(Caroline, mother to Tanya 17, Harry 3 and Lucy 2, married to househusband Darren)

Wentworth and Chell (2001:641) cite McCreary (1994) who went as far as suggesting that house husbands are seen as having their sexuality questioned

because it is so closely tied to their gender role. They also cite Frank's (1998) survey, 'which examined gender roles to determine if they had changed as a result of the father being at home'. The findings revealed that 'in several core areas that the answer was no. Men were still the primary drivers of the family vehicle and responsible for performing mechanical tasks at home'. This finding is echoed by a number of women with house husbands when they describe how their husband supports them with domestic tasks'. Silvia, describes how house husband Daniel, is reluctant to take on any stereotypically female tasks,

'He moans like a drain and says that I'm nagging him if I ask him to do things. You know it's like I'm giving him a list of chores to do or something. But yeah, it's... sometimes he'll do it. But sometimes "why don't you do it?" and I say "well I had to work all day didn't I and you're here all day". And it's just things like to do with money. If it's to do with the tax credits or something or the bills it's always me that has to ring up and sort it out because he's just clueless at that sort of thing. You know he's alright with his own stuff, you know his bikes and his cars and all the rest of it, that's fine. He'll spend ages working on those but yeah stuff in the house, tidying up... he'll do hoovering occasionally, he'll wash up, if he has to.....'

(Silvia, mother to Adie 7 and Ricky 4, married to House Husband Daniel)

Whilst it is difficult and would not be appropriate to draw conclusions without hearing the male voice directly, not just from his partner's perspective, the

findings in this research, lead us to reflect on the findings of Wentworth and Chell (2000:649) who indicate that,

‘Women and men differ in their rating of the house husband role. Women have lower levels of endorsement of the traditional gender roles than men do. Thus women seem to be more comfortable with the concept of house husband than menalthough women sometimes joke that it would be nice to come home to a ‘wife’, this is not likely to be the case. The house husband is not the mirror image of the house wife’.

This current research found that house husbands also appeared to be unable to provide the emotional support a woman may need after a stressful day at work in a pressurised position. In fact it was only the women who had house husbands who identified a lack of emotional support in their relationships, and pin pointed this to the fact that their partners were far removed from the working environment they were in. Jenny shares the lack of emotional support she receives from her househusband.

‘No, and that’s the one big thing for me is that we can’t share that. He’s not very keen to talk to me about work because he used to work as a Manager many years ago. He retired in 1997, but he’s not keen to talk about work. He doesn’t want to hear any, and I find that so hard. I’ve no one to off-load on.

(Jenny, mother to George 14 and Adam 10, married to retired Manager Mick)

The move away from male breadwinner families to dual breadwinning couples is now a norm in our society. When dual breadwinning couples have children, decisions have to be made regarding careers, employment and childcare. Some families don't want to use childcare and would rather bring their children up themselves. In those couples where the woman has more earning capacity, or is more career orientated than the man, becoming a househusband may be a viable option. In over a quarter of the interviews carried out, this model appeared to work. Thus, a significant finding from the question about the support a partner may or may not give is the number of house husbands who are providing childcare and, to various extents, running the household to enable mothers to work full-time. The women who had house husbands reported positively on the flexibility it gave them, their satisfaction with their childcare arrangements and they experienced fewer feelings of guilt around putting children in childcare and not being there for children. On the other hand, there were significant financial sacrifices that had been made which were putting pressure on a number of women. In addition, women lacked moral and emotional support from their partners who were no longer in the workplace themselves.

The chapter will now look at the support women who didn't have house husbands received from their partners and to what extent this was valuable in enabling them to work full-time and bring up children. The majority of the women interviewed in this study either had partners who worked full-time, or they were lone parents. The greatest help from partners, which enabled women to work full-time, was a shared responsibility of childcare. The vast majority of men helped where they could with childcare, either by dropping off or collecting

from school or nursery or by using some of their annual leave to look after children in the school holidays. This is consistent with findings from a report carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2005:3) which reported that, 'sixty six per cent of women working full-time said child care responsibilities were shared equally between both partners'.

The biggest tension within relationships seemed to be around taking time off, at short notice, if children were sick. At this point relationships tended to revert back to stereotypical care roles, placing pressure on women to take the time off work. However this wasn't necessarily due to the actions of partners but often due to the family friendly policies that women working for Lincolnshire County Council were able to take advantage of, where their partners weren't in a position to. Mary comments on this issue,

'The only issue I do find difficult, which isn't really something he causes but it is more of his employer, is if our son is suddenly ill and one of us has to pick him up it tends to fall to me because my employer is more flexible about that sort of thing whereas his is totally un-flexible and doesn't accept it if he could do that. But it is for me very important. If he was ... if didn't want to support me and wouldn't help with things like the nursery drop-offs and pick-ups it would make life much more difficult for me'.

(Mary, mother of Archie 3 and married to Dom)

There was a predictable response to the subject of the support women got with domestic duties in the household, which was that women felt that their partners

did not contribute to domestic duties as much as they might have done. This was in line with the literature. Kan (2008:45) refers to research that claims that,

‘Even when women have a full-time job, they still undertake the bulk of the housework, while men seem to be reluctant to increase the time they spend on housework (Gershuny, 1992; Layte, 1999; Morris 1990).’

Just over a quarter of women interviewed in the current research were happy with their partner’s contribution towards domestic work. Men were most willing to garden, clean cars, cook and vacuum. They were least willing to tidy and do the laundry. The general organisation of family lives fell, in the main, to women and this was an element that they were most prepared to take on board. Silvia explains that despite having a house husband, she still takes on the majority of the organisational responsibility.

‘I think I do the organisation. I still do that. So in the main I do the majority in organising the finances and that kind of stuff although he’s taking more of that on now. I would say I do the lion’s share, and you know if the children are invited to parties and stuff like that it’s me that kind of organises that – the presents and the cards and all the birthday cards and paying some of the bills and that kind of stuff. He has taken more of it on I guess but I would say it is probably 70:30 you know with me that does that’.

(Silvia, mother to Adie 7 and Ricky 4, married to House Husband Daniel)

There was, on the whole, acceptance of the fact that men did not share equally the division of household labour. A number of women referred to the fact that men did not see what needed doing unless it was pointed out and this caused some resentment. Where finances allowed women purchased domestic help and where they didn't they just got on with it. In the minority of cases where partners didn't provide any help with childcare or domestic responsibilities, or where women were lone parents, women mainly relied on their mothers for help. Leanne, a lone parent, explains how reliant she is on her mother for help.

‘But my mum supports me. My mum acts as my partner in some ways because my mum is my daughter’s registered childminder. She picks her up and takes her to school which enables me to go to work in the first place and other bits and pieces’.

(Leanne, lone mother to Daisy, 9)

The most positive responses were from women who viewed their relationships as equal, with regards to the support that both partners gave. However it is worth noting that these responses were in the minority (5 out of 29). Doreen explains how her partnership works.

‘We have an equal relationship. The kids are as happy with Keith as they are with me. Keith will do exactly the same with the kids as I would. He would ... do you know what I mean? It’s a completely 50:50 relationship. So I wouldn’t think twice at any time around going away for a girly weekend and he would look after them. I wouldn’t think twice

about going out. When he was at Uni we had childcare. When he wasn't at Uni and he was on a day off he looked after the kids, because he was having a day off. It's 50:50 and equally kids, I have never minded which one of us are there because we are both doing exactly the same thing. I might do hair a little better, I might be slightly better at putting the bobbles or the tights on! But they are used to that'.

(Doreen, mother to Rachel 14 and Naomi 9, married to Keith)

A finding worth highlighting is that women do rely heavily on their partner sharing childcare responsibilities and in the majority of cases the care is shared fairly, enabling both the woman and her partner to work full-time. Where the support is not there from a partner, there is a significant other to help share childcare responsibilities, even if it is with support in dropping off and collecting from formal childcare provision.

The chapter will now look at how critical support from outside the immediate family is in enabling a woman to work full-time and bring up children. Initially childcare will be discussed, the chapter will then go on to look at how valuable support networks and domestic help are.

How critical is childcare?

Childcare was viewed by all mothers as a critical element in enabling them to return to work. The table on the next page shows the types of childcare that women were currently using or had used in the past.

Table 4.5. Table to Show the types of Childcare Used by Women

Type of Childcare	Number of Women
Full Daycare	17
Before and after School clubs / care Holiday care	10
A mixture of care	10
Family	8
House Husband	8
Childminder	7

All women had paid for some form of childcare; the exception was where women had house husbands who stayed at home to look after the children. This finding is in line with Debacker (2008:542) who identified that:

‘Families with children make a fundamental choice between two different care paths: caring for the children themselves as much as possible or outsourcing much of the care work and focusing on ‘quality time’.

Dex (2003) suggests that where women paid for formal childcare, they mostly also used some form of informal childcare, often grandparents, to enable them to be flexible within their roles. This is consistent with the literature, which finds that full-time working mothers rely on additional help from informal carers in order to be reliable, flexible workers and cope with the unplanned and unexpected. Whilst children were very young, full daycare provision from day nurseries was by far the preferred option, with 17 women having used this

option at some point. The main reason for this was the long opening hours which enabled women to complete a full working day without juggling. Christine explains her preference for full daycare,

‘Nursery where they are open from 7.30 in the morning until 6 at night is a godsend. Yes, it’s expensive but you can fit your working day, your childcare – it doesn’t impact your working day’.

(Christine, mother to Claire 12)

Women were asked to identify the key factors which they felt led to successful childcare arrangements. Out of 29 women interviewed, 21 stated flexibility, 8 stated children being happy, 8 stated safety / trust, 3 stated affordability and 7 stated accessibility. Up until children went to school there were no major concerns regarding finding flexible and accessible childcare. Once children started school the need to find childcare before and after the school day and during school holidays became a concern for a number of women, particularly lone parents, and the need to have accessible childcare affected their choice of schools. This is consistent with Skinner (2003) cited by Dex (2003:8) who found childcare to be a problem for working parents of school age children, particularly during the school holidays. Carrie speaks about the problems she had finding wrap-around school care.

‘Yeah, so I spent three weeks looking at schools in Horncastle that have got registered childcare. Are there any schools at Scamblesby? What is there en route? What is there at Tealby? Tealby’s great but there are no

registered childcarers. So it comes down to registered childcare. But the registered childcare thing is a real big deal.

(Carrie, mother to Matthew 9)

As children got older, towards the upper end of primary school, the challenge to find appropriate childcare increased. Mothers reported that after school and holiday provision was more geared towards engaging children of a younger age and their children had 'grown out' of this type of provision. Even where mothers were able to find childcare for their older children, which their children enjoyed, there was still a significant issue around flexibility, both for enabling mothers to work a full day and to cater for any unplanned situations. Because of this mothers who needed the flexibility tended to use childminders for school children where they were available.

Lone parents were particularly challenged by finding childcare for school age children. Leanne, talks about her childminder who is also her mother, and the flexibility this gives her.

'Ah, now flexibility because occasionally I'm absolutely stuffed like a couple of weeks ago I didn't get in from work until nine o'clock at night whereas a normal childminder would not be able to do and she wouldn't give her tea either, which doesn't happen all that often but then it kind of slips into grandma duties. So yes. But just the taking the school and picking up from school thing, because I keep rigid hours so no the fact that it's my mum makes no difference. But in other ways when I do end

up having some kind of, emergency's not the right kind of word in my line of work, but kind of "thing" ... so yeah later on. There are times when I'm in a meeting and I know I'm not going to get back until seven o'clock.

(Leanne, lone mother to Daisy 8)

Whilst this is not new information, an important message which has emerged from the research is that, on top of formal, reliable and flexible childcare, a woman needs a partner or significant other, such as a mother who can help with childcare arrangements. For a woman working in a full-time professional or senior position the hours that childcare is available are not sufficient, particularly as children get older. Without a partner, or someone extremely close to them, the challenge of trying to work flexibly to meet the needs of the position is extremely difficult.

The value of support networks

In addition to childcare, women were asked about the support networks they had and the value they placed on these networks in enabling them to work full-time. Out of 29 women interviewed, 12 women had no support networks, 8 received support from family, 10 received support from friends and 4 received support from neighbours. There were only 2 women who claimed that their support network was critical in enabling them to work full-time. Both of these women were lone parents who had used their mother as their main childcarer at some point in time and had identified her as being their support network too.

In the majority of cases, the value placed on support networks was not for the fact that it enabled women to work full-time but for other reasons, mainly related to enabling them to have support and flexibility outside work. This is an alternative perspective on the value of support networks in comparison with some of the literature. Dex (2003) highlights the importance attached to the childcare network by working mothers and cites the studies of Bell and La Valle, 2003; Skinner, 2003; Green and Canny, 2003 and Yeandle et al., 2002. However the literature does suggest that the childcare network is needed more by low income families, indeed Macran et al (1996) put forward a view that mothers who earn higher salaries are better placed to pay for formal quality childcare thereby relieving some of the pressures of depending on potentially unreliable informal networks. Christine, a lone mother, explains that her support network is more about adult support and the non-judgemental company it provides, rather than practical help with childcare.

‘It’s (the support network) enabling me to stay sane, but not necessarily job-related. It’s more let me go sit quietly with somebody that won’t think I’m going nuts if I sit there and go, can I give her back please? I’ve had enough so can she go and play in your back garden? You know, that sort of support rather than practical and work-related’.

(Christine, lone mother to Claire 12)

Doreen values her support networks but was very clear that she wouldn’t use them for childcare to enable her to work full-time,

‘Accessible childcare for work – I need to have paid for it or used my family. I do make that very, very clear distinction. And I have never ever, ever blurred it, and I have always said I would never blur it because I think that if I did the difference between a formal arrangement, anything that’s paid for, and an informal form of childcare support, friendship and all the rest of it, I do believe you should not blur the two’.

(Doreen, mother to Rachel 14 and Naomi 9)

It was surprising the number of women who reported having no support networks, although a number of these women had house husbands at home. The fact that they knew they had no support networks had in some cases influenced their decision to have one parent at home full-time. Mary spoke of how a more robust support network might help her at work, whilst she recognised it might not be best for her child.

‘Well I suppose I sometimes think it would be easier to work without interruption if you did have a sort of informal support network that was more robust than mine is because there are occasions where I have to suddenly drop everything and go and look after Archie and be off work for a couple of days and had to cancel meetings and let other people down. I think if I had a bit more informal support it would be best for my job but I don’t think that would necessarily be the right thing for Archie because he often, if he’s ill, they need their mum don’t they so in a way it has to be me. He’s not old enough’.

(Mary, mother to Archie 3)

Support networks therefore, whilst useful for helping give a little flexibility and perhaps some sanity, were not viewed as being an enabler in supporting women to work full-time and have children. Permanent, formal and reliable childcare arrangements were what enabled women to work full-time and bring up children rather than a good support network.

Domestic support

Women were asked about domestic help that they purchased or employed to enable them to work full-time and bring up children. Gatrell (2005:66) cites Deem (1996) who suggests that 'for women in middle class occupations there is a greater likelihood that they would be able to afford domestic help'. Women were asked if they paid for any domestic help, however, previous responses regarding both financial situations and having house husbands at home pre-empted the response to this question to a certain extent. Out of the 29 women interviewed, 7 employed some form of domestic help. Out of the women who employed domestic help the majority employed a cleaner, 2 had their ironing done and 1 had a gardener. The results clearly showed that employing domestic help was seen as a luxury. Out of the 22 women who didn't employ any support, 18 unprompted said they would like a cleaner. Christine was typical of a number of women,

'I wish! I wish I could afford it – a cleaning lady, a gardener, a window cleaner. It would be nice. Please – someone to come in and do the ironing. But no, if I could afford it I think I would, yes'.

(Christine, lone mother to Claire 12)

Women who paid for domestic support placed immense value on it, particularly with regard to the time that it freed up for them to spend with their children. Sue shares how valuable domestic support is to her,

‘It’s absolutely invaluable. If you’re doing a full time demanding job I do not want to be up until 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning cleaning my house, doing all the other stuff that needs doing, so no you have to have it if you are doing a job of this level anyway. I have a cleaner twice a week. One on a Tuesday, she does my four hours, she does all the ironing, and she hangs it all up in the wardrobes. I leave it in the basket and make sure it’s all done for Tuesday. She irons it all, hangs it up and puts it all away. It’s done. Then she goes through and cleans. Then on a Wednesday my little old man does the garden, three hours a week and he loves it and takes the dog for a walk. They all take the dog for a walk when they come. Then on Friday morning Linda, my other cleaning lady comes, she does three hours and she cleans the place and it’s absolutely gleaming for the week. All I have to do is the shopping then. I would recommend it to anybody if they’ve got a family because it gives me family time. I have Sunday afternoons and I take my son swimming. I’m not there cleaning the house’.

(Sue, mother to Craig 18 and Peter 13)

The majority of women who didn’t pay for domestic help took a pragmatic approach to house hold duties, Jane’s attitude was fairly typical,

‘If I want to do anything the domestic chores will wait. I don’t think I must clean up, I must spend hours and hours and hours on cleaning up and miss out on other things, because that can wait. It can be done on a night time, it can be done anytime. It doesn’t have to be done when the children are there and half the time by the time you’ve tidied up the toys are back out again and you are thinking “I’ve just put them away”. So I want them to be children. I want them to enjoy their home, the garden and everything about it’.

(Jane, mother to Lily, 5 and Bertie, 3)

Conclusion

In conclusion, some key but unexpected findings have emerged from the research discussed in this chapter. These are the amount of women who were primary earners and the number of households which had house husbands, enabling women to pursue a full-time career.

The dependence upon women’s earnings was explored in detail, particularly in relation to whether full-time work would be their preference. Whilst all women reported that full-time work was the only option they considered following motherhood, this is where the consensus ended. In contrast and presenting a challenge to Hakim (2000) a number of women would have preferred to work part-time if circumstances had allowed and they failed to fit neatly into Hakim’s categorisation of women. What was clear from the study was that whilst women

were all working full-time, their circumstances at home and the coping mechanisms they used were unique to the individual. The support they received or employed varied. Support networks of families, friends and neighbours and domestic help were found to be helpful, by those who had access to them, but not critical in enabling a mother to work full-time.

The prevalence of house husbands was an unexpected finding. For a variety of reasons, but mainly because the woman had more earning capacity or potential, this model made sense within the family unit. The house husband model gave the family the flexible, reliable childcare they needed and also the flexibility that the woman needed in order to work full-time. The woman, in this situation, no longer had to depend on the flexibility an organisation could give her access to. The sacrifice, however, was financial with only one income coming into the household.

The level of a woman's education was not viewed as an enabler in returning to the work place but was viewed by the majority of women as a motivating factor and something that drove them to pursue a career full-time. A certain level of education also enabled a woman to secure a position with a level of remuneration which made returning to work full-time not just financially viable but essential to the household income.

Findings regarding childcare as an enabler echoed findings from the literature. Mothers need both reliable childcare and flexibility in their work roles, to enable them to work full-time. The research recognises that all family situations are

unique and families will therefore all have different mechanisms for enabling mothers to work full-time. Some families will pay for childcare to enable them to work full-time and will depend on the flexibility of their role and employer in order to make this work. The women who struggled the most were those with older children and those who were on their own. The group of women who were most happy with their childcare arrangements were those who had house husbands at home looking after their children.

The next chapter will consider the third key finding from this research, which is the concept that women constantly navigate conflicting demands to enable them to cope with working full time and bringing up their children.

Chapter 5 - Coping mechanisms for mothers working full-time: imposing their own glass ceilings

Introduction

This chapter will consider the third key finding which has emerged from this research, and will put forward the argument that the women who participated in this research constantly navigate and prioritise conflicting demands to enable them to cope with working full time and bringing up their children.

Initially this chapter will explore the debate around structure and agency in relation to women's career progression. It will firstly explore structural explanations for women not progressing within their careers. Barriers put in place by employers and employing organisations are the most commonly perceived factors for women hitting glass ceilings (Mathur-Helm, 2006; Gold and Veale, 1998; Liff and Ward 2001). Other structural factors which could influence and impact upon the career progression of women may be the attitudes of people who are close to them, including their partner or practical barriers, such as being unable to find suitable childcare (Gold and Veale, 1998). Whilst acknowledging that previous studies have found that structural barriers have impacted upon women in relation to their career progression (Weyer, 2007; Forster, 2001), an argument will be put forward that it is not the case with this particular group of women due to a number of reasons which will be explored.

The chapter will then go on to explore the impact of agency on women's decisions regarding career progression. Career progression to date and attitudes towards ambition will be discussed, with the purpose of arguing that these women are well placed for career progression and have, in the majority of cases, been promoted since having children. Examining women's attitudes towards further promotion and their views on work-life balance, leads to the conclusion that women will place restrictions on themselves, in various areas of their lives, to enable them to manage to pursue a full-time career and bring up children.

Structural Barriers – Career pathways and progression

The question of structure or agency was discussed at length in the literature review. The question in relation to women's career progression is, which is the dominant influence in shaping women's career paths, that of agency (the women's own decisions and actions) or that of structure (environmental factors, often beyond a woman's control)? The chapter will now examine the findings from this research around women's career progression and pathways. This research aims to show that, in this study, decisions regarding the extent of career progression and promotion have been consciously made by the women and therefore in order to navigate the conflicting demands of life, women have imposed their own restrictions. Whilst the initial literature review identified research which suggested that women often choose a lateral or horizontal career pathway following motherhood (Amos-Wilson, 1996; Burke and McKeen, 1996; Carbrera, 2006; O'Leary, 1997; Mavin, 2001) there appears to be a gap

in the literature exploring the decision making process behind this choice. It is hoped that discussion of the findings from this research will make a contribution towards evidencing and understanding why women make these decisions.

Stelter (2002: 88) states that 'the relative scarcity of women in top leadership roles is not a new phenomenon'. Despite the fact that there are more women in the workforce and an increasing number of women in managerial positions, it would seem that the number of women accessing senior management positions is vastly disproportionate to the number of women in work. There must therefore be factors preventing women reaching the top of the career ladder (Oakley, 2000; Stelter, 2002; Veale and Gold, 1998). Whilst women, in this study, were not specifically asked about barriers to career progression they were asked several questions regarding organisational impact. Women were asked to describe the ethos of the organisation they worked for, with regards to attitudes to working mothers, and the impact this had on their current employment status. In contrast to the literature (Coates, 1997), all responses were positive and there was no mention of any negative attitudes towards them. There could be several reasons behind this; it could be the case that in the last decade attitudes have changed significantly. However it is more likely that the women interviewed for this research, in 2008, had positive experiences in the workplace due to the support they had received from a family friendly employer. Thereby their perceptions of attitudes in the workplace were generally positive. Frances summed up the majority of responses by simply stating, 'I don't think there's any negative attitudes'.

In relation to gender there were a number of responses which indicated that women had positive experiences and didn't feel discriminated against. Carrie's experiences led her to believe that discrimination doesn't exist in the workplace.

'It doesn't exist (attitudes towards working mothers). You're just a worker like everybody else. I don't think that the working mother thing comes into it..... you are another Officer'.

(Carrie, mother to Matthew, 9)

Several women took the opportunity, at this stage, to share their feelings about how supportive the organisation had been and about how they had been treated in relation to career progression. Doreen shares how supported she feels,

'I think clearly I have been with the organisation for two years and I have been supported, I have been promoted, I have had access to training and development, so I think it is really positive. I have to say I have nothing negative to say in any way. I think you can work flexibly, you can work from home, you can sort your own hours out, you know ... I personally was promoted significantly over two years. I'm not saying that I didn't put a lot of work into that, because I have. But, I personally think it is positive and I think our service in particular does have a real mix'.

(Doreen, mother to Rachel, 14 and Naomi, 9)

It can therefore be argued that there is little evidence to show that there are any attitudinal or cultural structural barriers in place that have impacted on these

women, in relation to feeling discriminated against in the workplace. In fact, whilst there was no mention of any negativity towards them, the majority of women were keen to share information about how well supported they felt at work.

Another structural factor which could influence and impact upon the career progression of women is the attitudes of people who are close to them, including their partner (Gold and Veale, 1998; Schultheiss et al, 2001). Gold and Veale (1998:19) state,

‘Women managers identified that the most important factor in juggling career and home-life was to have a supportive partner and family. For those women who had stayed with their partners it was their positive attitude towards their career that had enabled them to become qualified and gain promotion’.

Women were asked, during the interviews, if attitudes of their immediate family or close friends had an impact on their decision or ability to work full time. The attitudes and potential influence of others could be viewed as possible barriers, influencing women’s decisions not to progress their careers further. The response to this question was mixed in terms of the reaction women had from immediate families and close friends towards them continuing to pursue their career full-time and bring up children. Some women had experienced negative reactions from family and friends. Sue explains her mother-in-law’s reaction to her working full-time.

‘The mother-in-law has come from that background where the woman doesn’t work. So she was absolutely mortified at the idea that I was going back to work, even part time. So she has always been quite antagonistic about that. She has never approved of it. Still doesn’t, even to this day’.

(Sue, mother to Craig 18 and Peter 13)

Other women had experienced much more support from close family and friends. Julie, who had been a carer for her mother for a number of years before pursuing her career, explains how supportive close family and friends have been.

‘I’ve had only positive really, proud of me for where I am from when I was with my mum. You know they’re very proud of where I am today. They are very supportive. They feel I work too hard. They are worried, concerned about me.... So all very positives’.

(Julie, mother to George, 14 and Adam, 10).

What was made consistently clear was whatever views other people had expressed, they had little perceived influence on decisions women had made about their career.

Laura shares why this is the case.

‘But I don’t think it had any influence on what I do because I have to do it.
I don’t have any choice’.

(Laura, mother to Jonnie, 5; Annabel 1 and stepmother to Cath, 16.)

It can therefore be argued, that the structural factor of the views of others and the impact of these views has had little influence on the women interviewed, with regards to decisions they have made about their careers.

Agency Barriers – Career pathways and progression

This chapter will now examine women’s career progression to date, in order to evidence that these women have the potential to progress within their chosen career, if they choose to do so. In addition it will look at women’s attitudes towards ambition and further career progression which identifies a pattern of reluctance to progress vertically. It is hoped that by giving an insight into women’s experiences and plans for their careers, the argument that agency is the driving force behind the direction of women’s career pathways will be evidenced.

Carli and Eagly (2001:632) make reference to the suggestion that women lack the appropriate education and background to rise to the top of organisational hierarchies. They refer to the,

‘lack of women in powerful positions as the “pipeline problem”, that is the interpretation that women with the appropriate education and background are not available’.

The findings discussed in the previous chapter, which outline the levels of qualifications of the women interviewed, provide evidence to dispute this assumption. Women were asked to give an overview of their career progression from having their first child to their current position. It was hoped that this would give a picture of the direction of the careers of full-time working mothers. Interestingly, the majority of women, 24 out of the 29, had received some form of promotion and career progression since the birth of their first child. When asked whether they had made a conscious decision about their career direction since having children, only 5 out of the 29 women said they had. Most women appeared to have taken advantage of opportunities that had arisen rather than meticulously planning career progression. This provides evidence that not only have career opportunities been available to these women within the work-place but it is the first insight we get into women not consciously planning a path of career progression following motherhood. Silvia explains how her career has moved forward in an opportunistic manner since having children. She is realistic about the pressure that further career progression would result in.

‘I suppose I, you know because I’m not hugely ambitious, I just do what... I like to be challenged, don’t get me wrong, but you know I just kind of go with the flow if you see what I mean. I mean I’ll take opportunities if they come up if they sound interesting which is what I’ve done but you know

I'm not sort of driving it. I know some people can do it, can't they, and they can work full time and have a really challenging, stressful job and still manage to bring up kids. But I don't think that's me. I think if I was to go much higher I think I would find it more difficult'.

(Silvia, mother to Adie 6 and Ricky 4)

Amos-Wilson (1996:29) also identified, 'a lack of clear career related ambitions in women'. She claimed that this 'could be due to the function of the other assumed "career" ambition of women, that is, to be a mother'. She states that 'it is often popularly argued that women have difficulty in progressing in their careers because of both the material and the psychological demands of motherhood'.

Women were asked if they were ambitious, the reason behind asking this question was to determine if ambition was a driving force which enabled them to work full-time. It has already been identified, in the previous chapter, that women believe it is necessary to work full-time in order to maintain their existing career level or progress to the next stage. All women were therefore well placed to seek further promotion, should it be on their own personal agendas. It was therefore surprising, that when asked if they were ambitious, over half the women struggled with this question and couldn't give a direct 'yes' or 'no' answer. They referred to words such as 'ruthless' and 'cut-throat' and 'climbing up the greasy pole', implying negative connotations associated with ambition. The majority of women felt uncomfortable acknowledging that they were

ambitious regarding career progression. One woman's response was 'I try to be' and she went on to describe conflicting priorities within her life.

These findings are line with Fels (2004:1) who reported that during her research she identified the hatred women expressed towards the word ambition when applied to their own lives. For the women, 'ambition implied egotism, selfishness, self-aggrandizement and the manipulative use of others for one's own end'. In contrast, when interviewing men the difference was significant, 'the men I interviewed considered ambition a necessary and desirable part of their lives'.

Amos-Wilson (1996:28) suggests that it could be,

'misleading to see women as less ambitious in their careers than men.

Their aspirations may well be similar but, in addition to being less able to identify what they want, the problem may emerge from a combination of being both told they cannot aspire to certain careers and being prevented from taking them up, because it is assumed that what women want to do in the rest of life has to fit in with motherhood'.

This could partly explain the fact that despite the majority of women having experienced career progression since motherhood, only 7 out of the 29 women interviewed were interested in vertical career progression, at the current time, and only 5 described themselves as being ambitious. Whilst these women had been receptive to career progression following motherhood, it appears that this

was progression up to a certain level of responsibility only, these women have made a conscious decision not to progress their career any further. This would indicate that women know at what point they can manage the demands of their position at work and their family responsibilities. In all these cases it was due to the perceived impact a promotion would have on their work-life balance and ultimately their children. This is in line with existing literature, O'Leary (1997:97) points out that, unlike men,

‘women’s career development models are premised on the notion of achieving a shifting balance between career and other significant relationships’.

Many women interviewed spoke about how their priorities had changed following motherhood. Christine shares how her priorities have changed.

‘I used to be ambitious, but not since I had my daughter. To be successfully ambitious you have to be prepared to move and from when I left college to my mid-thirties I moved jobs and quite often towns and in one case countries every two years. If you have got a career path you have to... But once you have a child and you have childcare and you have schools you lose ... your ambition shrinks to the organisation ... to the local, and I don't call that ambitious’.

(Christine, mother to Claire 12)

Even where women expressed a strong desire to progress their careers, they still were battling with the impact this would have on their lives. Jenny explains the internal battle she is going through.

‘So I think at the moment where I’m at I’m coping, I’m managing, I’m comfortable. I’m confident. I know the area and I know that I can do it. If you go in a different full time role elsewhere in the Council and it’s fairly new you know that’s quite stressful to put yourself in that position and given where I’m at the moment. I personally would like to do that but I am not sure that’s the best thing for my family. I personally want it really badly and I think sometimes it holds me back even when I go in an interview because I think at the back of my mind I can do this actually but I think that because of the way the family is and the demands of the family I’m not actually going to be able to do it as well as I want to do it’.

(Jenny, mother to George 14 and Adam 10)

Having grappled with the question around ambition, women were asked if they were dedicated to their career and, unlike the previous question, all women, without deliberation, said they were. They were much more comfortable talking about how they took pride in doing a job well and gained satisfaction from it. O’Leary (1997:97) points out that,

‘the career-ambitious individual is one who measures success in both professional and personal arenas through subjective measures such as perceived degrees of challenge, satisfaction or sense of growth or

development. Here the only competition evident is that associated with the individual challenging him or herself’.

A number of responses echoed O’Leary’s findings. Leanne shares what dedication to her career means to her.

‘If you’re talking about ambition that I want to move up the greasy pole and have more responsibility etcetera, etcetera, not in that way. If you are talking about ambition that I want to know more, I want to learn more, and I want to be better at my job, then yes because the next stage up for me is I start looking at management and then that takes me away from looking at archaeology and looking at buildings and the things I love so yes in one way, and no in another’.

(Leanne, mother to Daisy 8)

Another theme from the findings, worth commenting on, is that a number of women made reference to the future and spoke about alternative options for their future careers which involved pursuing horizontal or lateral career paths. Mavin (2001:185) cites findings from White et al.’s (1992) study which showed that,

‘Women expressed a high need for achievement, though this was seen more as attaining progressively more challenging and satisfying positions than progressing to the top of organisational hierarchies’.

Laura shares her thoughts about pursuing a horizontal career path in the future.

‘When I ever think about where I would like to go, what would I like to do it tends not to be going higher. It tends to be maybe looking at a slightly different remit within the same sphere. So for example at the moment I do operational HR advice so it is advising them on grievances, disciplinaries, that sort of thing. But I have thought about maybe training and looking at – I do provide a little bit of training. I work for, or support, Fire and Rescue so recently we have been doing a bit of training with them. So that has always been a thought at the back of my mind that maybe I would like to get into that. But it is not really an upward move it is more of a sideways one’.

(Laura, mother to Jonnie 5 and Annabel 1)

Findings from this area of research, around career ambition and progression, add weight to existing literature on this subject. Whilst both demonstrate evidence that women tend to prefer and experience lateral rather than vertical career paths, this research showed that the majority of women had received some form of promotion in their career since becoming a mother.

A significant finding from this research is that the limitations placed on women regarding career progression appear to be as a result of their own restrictions. The literature review revealed a gap in the literature exploring the decision making process behind this choice. The question initially posed regarding horizontal rather than vertical progression was, has it really been a choice or

has it been a decision women have been forced to make in order to combine a career and motherhood? This research has evidenced the fact that the majority of women are happy to attain a level of promotion they feel comfortable with, realising that progressing to the next vertical career level wouldn't work for their families and would put too much pressure on their lives. This prevents them progressing to the top of the organisational hierarchy at this point in time, but it is a compromise they are prepared to make in order to navigate the conflicting demands in their lives.

The discussion at the beginning of this chapter provides evidence that structural factors have had a minimal impact on preventing these women progressing in their careers. Evidence from this research shows that women are very adept at recognising their limitations in life and have a good sense of when to draw the line at committing to further pressures. Women can balance working full-time, at a level of responsibility they are comfortable with, as well as bringing up children. However, when women have tried to take anything else on in addition to working and bringing up their children, for example committing to a course of study, this has put immense pressure on them, impacting negatively on all aspects of their lives. Deana shares how hard she is finding it to balance her life, having committed to further study.

'My life consists of work, children, study, work, children, study. I'm doing a Masters Degree at We had one particular module where I was going back on the Sunday night and Danielle sobbed. She absolutely sobbed and I said to my husband "I can't do this anymore"

and I can guarantee if all my stuff hadn't have been in my student accommodation and I had got to go back and pick it all up I would have said on the Sunday night "I'm not doing this anymore, the kids are suffering and I'm giving it up" and he was there saying to me "you can't give this up" you know "what does that tell them in future life where mum's doing a degree, something's got a bit difficult, she's chucked it all in – what sort of message are you sending to them?" I can't tell you, Rebecca, I could have absolutely sobbed'.

(Deana, mother to Simone 8 and Danielle 5)

Balance and Conflict

This research would suggest that slowing down or stalling career progression is one element of how women attempt to achieve a work-life balance. The chapter will now explore other aspects of life women navigate, in order to enable them to continue to pursue a career full-time and bring up children. The discussion will be based around work-life balance and work-life conflict. The findings identify three categories of women: those who have achieved work-life balance; those who have acknowledged the fact that they won't achieve it due to pursuing their career ambitions and those who are trying to achieve it but are still experiencing work-family conflict. The concept of leisure time, in terms of work-life balance is explored. The key finding highlighted here is the extent that women value time spent with their children and families and are prepared to compromise not only their own career progression but also their own leisure time and social lives in order to maintain a healthy balance in life.

Literature around both work-life balance and the conflict that can occur between pressures of work and pressures outside work was discussed in the literature review. The majority of women in this study have been able to work through a process similar to that described by Clutterbuck in Chapter Two to achieve a balance in life which enables them to work full-time and bring up children. The findings establish that women have very limited 'me time' but accept this is part of the package of working full-time and bringing up children. This is accepted and not begrudged. Women are positive about using the time they have outside work to spend with their children and family and their children's leisure and social life is often doubled as the women's own leisure time and social life.

The fact that women prioritise elements of their lives in order to put their children first portrays the image of a 'selfless mother'. However, literature on the institution of motherhood does not agree.

Rich (2001) cited by Gatrell (2005:50) introduced the 'institution of motherhood' as,

'a purely social construction established by a patriarchal society to undermine the social identity of women'.

She challenged assertions that a 'natural mother' is,

'a person without further identity, one who can find her chief gratification in being all day with small children [and] that maternal love is, and should be, quite literally selfless'.

Despite the majority of women in this study showing what could be considered as 'selfless traits' including sacrificing career progression and their own free time for the sake of their families, they would still be subject to the 'mother blaming theories', arising from Bowlby (1955) who argued that the care of the child by its mother for the first three years of its life was critical to its future wellbeing and mental health.

In addition to the responsibilities of balancing motherhood with work, evidence suggests that women still bear the brunt of the domestic responsibility regardless of their career and the money they earn. Kan (2008:45) suggests that,

'even when women have a full-time job, they still undertake the bulk of housework, while men seem to be reluctant to increase the time they spend on housework'.

Forster (2001) interviewed a number of female academics in a traditional UK University in order to ascertain the conflicts they experienced between their work and personal lives. He found that some of the women reported that they had opted to put their careers on hold because of domestic and family responsibilities. A few had resigned themselves to never achieving senior positions because of these commitments.

Degrees of Work-Life Balance

On the whole, the women interviewed in this research placed great importance on work-life balance. Out of the 29 women interviewed, 21 believed they had been able to achieve a degree of work-life balance. These were the women who had reached a level of seniority and responsibility within their career they were currently comfortable with. This was a more positive response than anticipated and a significant finding from this research was that the women interviewed fell into one of three groups. These three groups will be discussed below.

The first group could be categorised as women who had achieved a work-life balance by successfully navigating conflicting demands and priorities in a number of areas in their lives. This group consisted of women who were able to draw a clear line between work-life and home-life and this enabled them to achieve a work-life balance and minimise work-family conflict. Women were able to do this with varying degrees of ease and all stated that their ability to 'switch off' from work enabled them to prioritise time with their family, out of working hours. The ability to switch off appeared to be the secret to success. Joanna explains how she is clearly able to draw the line between home and work.

'Yes, I have. I think it is a fairly successful balance. I must admit I am one who will also be able to not take work home and not bring home to work. I do have this dividing line in my mind, which you may think oh that's a callous attitude but it is the only ... it's my coping mechanism because, you know, I deal with quite sensitive issues here at work and if I

had to think of all of that as well while I am dealing with three children there's just no way so I just put it away'.

(Joanna, mother to Rosie 12 and the twins 9)

There was a general feeling amongst women in this first category that working full-time and bringing up children would never enable you to give one hundred per cent to your work and your family and that there was a degree of compromise involved. Dawn shares her thoughts on this,

'I think it is one of those cases that you're never going to please all of the people all of the time, are you? My daughter has made comments from time to time "why can't you come on the school trip with us? Other mums come on the school trip" and "why can't you pick me up at a quarter past three like all the other mums do?" And you have to try and explain well if you want to go on the nice holidays and you want this, that and the other and that's why I work full time and things like that. So in terms of her expectations I don't think I probably meet her expectations. But I hope in the longer term she will appreciate what I have done, what she has had out of it really. Because I think she is happy most of the time'.

(Dawn, mother to Molly, 7)

The second group of women could be categorised as women with limited work-life balance, who were continuing to progress their careers. This

group of women recognised that they weren't achieving a work-life balance and that work was taking a priority in their life. This group were smaller in number; only 4 out of 29 women fell into this category. They knew that they didn't have the balance right but appeared to accept that was the way it worked for them. These women accepted that this was the case, with varying degrees of guilt and anxiety, mainly due to the work-family conflict they experienced. These were the same women who were still keen to pursue vertical career progression. Only 1 woman, Doreen, accepted that this was the reality and didn't express feelings of guilt or regret.

'It's hard on the kids. I don't think I achieve a healthy work/life balance. I think it is clearly swayed in terms of work. I don't even put that down to any pressure from the organisation. I put that down to the pressure that I put myself under. And no, I don't think I have a healthy balance. I am sure at some point I will regret that. But the kids are familiar with that. That's our working life'.

(Doreen, mother to Rachel 14 and Naomi 9)

The other 3 women were uncomfortable about work taking up so much of their time and displayed anxiety and unhappiness about this. Deana shares how uncomfortable she feels with the situation she is in.

'and you know sometimes I'm not comfortable in my own skin because I beat myself up constantly about should I be there more for the children and I think that you know as of today I could say to you work/life balance, work gets the better of me without a doubt. But I have to make a real

conscious effort not to let the work take over, because I am ambitious. So in order to give you that edge over your colleagues.... it is about having that extra flare and that extra edge, and sometimes that means extra work and extra reading and a bigger commitment'.

(Deana, mother to Simone 8 and Danielle 5)

The third group of women can be categorised as women struggling to achieve a balance and navigate and prioritise conflicting demands. They desperately wanted to achieve a work-life balance but for a variety of reasons weren't able to draw the line as effectively as the women from the first group and this impacted on both their work and home lives. They experienced both work-family conflict and family-work conflict and they felt they were losing control in the various spheres of life, which was an uncomfortable feeling for them. Jenny explains the difficulties she is having in trying to strike a balance in her life and impose any ceilings either at work and at home, leaving her with a sense of losing control.

'I don't know if I have to be honest. I mean I did have to say to my husband the other week that I didn't think my quality of life, that at this current moment was very good really, Rebecca, I did have to say that. I mean in terms of the work, I've got problems at work with one of my many staff having to go through HR and that side of it and there's massive work to do in this area, a massive agenda and we're very lean resourced and then at home there's mega-loads to do. I mean we're having a lot of refurbishments on the house at the moment so we've got

about four or five projects between now and next year so it's all cranked up. The house is in a mess and I can't stand the house in too much of a mess. I need to have, like we were talking about earlier, having it like a well-oiled machine and clockwork. Well because things are happening then we are not always readily able to find our stuff. It's all just a ripple effect and things start getting a bit what I call hairy. I like things to be fairly straight and tidy because then it operates well. At the moment it's a bit out of kilter and it's a bit stressful and what I'm feeling is not very, I'm feeling quite stressed at work because of this situation at the minute and I'm feeling quite stressed at home because you know I'm living with 3 men and living with 3 men's shoes just thrown all over the place, bags, dirty clothes and I can say to the umpteenth degree and they don't seem to listen. So yeah I think it feels a bit stressful at the moment I must admit. I don't think I've got that work/life balance'.

(Jenny, mother to George 14 and Adam 10)

A key finding from this research is that whilst mothers' time and energy is a fixed resource, by prioritising and managing conflicting demands mothers were able to balance working full-time and bringing up their children but there was room for little more in their lives. Their own leisure time or time with their partner diminished and in the majority of cases this was replaced by spending time with their children or as a family. For the purpose of this work, leisure time is defined as 'use of free time for enjoyment'. (The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, 2009)

These findings echo those of Warren (2004) who identified a lack of research about the significance of leisure time within working women's lives and carried out a piece of research to explore how women in different types of part and full time jobs access leisure time. The results of Warren's research, which compares full and part-time working females with and without children, working in three occupational sectors – manual, clerical and professional, reports women with children working full time in a professional capacity as being the least satisfied group of women with regards to their amount and use of leisure time (their free time for enjoyment) but the most satisfied group of women in terms of satisfaction with their social lives (the time they spent with others). Warren's findings were reinforced during this research where women were viewing the time they spent with their children, as a key element of their leisure and social time. This was the way women who had children and worked full-time managed to achieve some leisure time and a social life. In this research, women were prompted to talk about the time they had with their families and also any leisure time they had for themselves. In line with Warren's findings, not one woman claimed to have enough 'me time' or time for herself. Deana talks about the lack of time she has for herself.

'You know a lot of people sometimes say to me "I don't know how you do what you do!" I am almost like, you know, I have to fit this in regardless of the impact it has on me personally. So there are times when I think oh it would be really nice to just sit and read a magazine or it would be really nice to, I don't know, go and have a facial or something you know like other women do. My coping strategy is that without a doubt personally

all that stuff for me gets put to one side. You know I said I would be really honest with you. My doctor has recently said to me “what do you do for you?” and she has actually said to me you have to start doing something for yourself. Well I haven’t got time, Rebecca. That sounds stupid and I am an intelligent woman and I know that that is not sustainable but I haven’t got time for me at the moment’.

(Deana, mother to Simone 8 and Danielle 5)

However, on the whole, women didn’t complain about not having any time to themselves. It was accepted that this was part of the compromise of working full-time and bringing up children. Much of women’s leisure time was spent with or revolved around their children. This was either because it was how they wished to spend their free time or due to ‘over compensation’ for not having enough time for their children during the working week. As Warren found, their social and family lives revolved around the children. Silvia explains how her social life doubles up as her leisure time and always revolves around the children.

‘Um... we always do kiddy things, you know things the kids will enjoy because if you don’t then you’re all suffering! But we try to do things that are interesting for us as well. I mean we go and see castles and things like that. They really like doing that. So we go to Belton and they can play around the house or whatever, you know. We go to the cinema and watch their films. But I try to go and see the ones that aren’t too awful! Since we moved to we’ve made friends with the people across the

road and we see them quite a bit. Yeah, so at weekends it is... we would take the kids over and the kids will play. They don't always get on. We feed them with the DVD and Playstation and sit out and have some wine in the garden you know. So yeah I suppose I do. I probably have more time... I mean I don't have time on my own if you see what I mean. But I have leisure, social time. I do get that. I do get that at weekends'.

(Silvia, mother to Adie 7 and Ricky 4)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has put forward the argument that the women who participated in this research constantly navigate conflicting demands to enable them to cope with working full time and bringing up their children. The early part of the chapter examined factors that may act as structural barriers to career progression. Whilst it is acknowledged that the evidence put forward has limitations, due to the questions asked during the research, there is sound evidence to state that structural factors have not significantly impacted upon women's career progression in this study. All women who were interviewed were realistic about what they could achieve in life and recognised the constraints they faced. The majority of them have navigated and prioritised, often in the form of imposing restrictions in all aspects of their lives. Building on the findings in the previous chapter, the following evidence substantiates this statement. The women are well educated and all have been able to establish careers. The majority of women have received some form of promotion leading to career progression, since having children. Most women value work-life

balance and acknowledge that progressing within their careers would impact heavily on time spent with their families.

In addition, the following evidence from this research supports the statement that women are realistic about what they can cope with. As well as imposing a barrier to their career progression they are able to impose other constraints which assist them in coping. Women are realistic about the number of children they have and are prepared to limit this, sometimes at the expense of their maternal desires, in order to cope. Women will accept financial sacrifices, where having a house husband at home is viewed as the best option for their family situation. This would suggest that women who are able to cope with working full-time and bringing up their children have certain qualities around being able to accept compromise in life, as part of the balancing act they undertake on a daily basis.

Finally, the other significant finding discussed in this chapter is that women fitted neatly into three categories in terms of work-life balance. These categories of: those who had achieved a work life balance they were happy with; those whose work-life balance was heavily skewed towards their commitment to work and finally those who were struggling to achieve a work-life balance emerged during an analysis of the findings and was not a categorisation I had encountered during the literature review.

The next chapter will bring this piece of research to a conclusion, summarising the key findings and highlighting its significance, value and the contribution it makes in this field of literature.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The primary purpose of this thesis has been to explore the research question: 'What enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children?' It has aimed to identify and understand the variable factors that women who work-full time, and bring up children, contend with on a daily basis and what enables them to have a career and children.

In order to fully answer this question, the specific research objectives have been:

1. To gather the necessary background information from women, in order to establish to what extent personal circumstances impact upon women's ability to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children.
2. To identify specific 'enablers' or enabling factors which enable women to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children.
3. To determine patterns in strategies women take to enable them to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children.

Significant conclusions from this study

This research has been successful in meeting the research objectives and has thereby been able to provide an answer to the research question. I can conclude that the research provides a valuable and unique contribution to existing literature in this field because it:

1. Provide a sound challenge to Hakim's preference theory, regarding the concept of preference and choice and categorisation of women.
2. Identifies the variable factors which enable a woman to pursue a career full-time and bring up children.
3. Proposes the concept that women constantly navigate and prioritise conflicting demands to enable them to cope with working full time and bringing up their children.

This chapter will now take each of these contributions in turn and conclude on the specific findings which have led to these statements being made.

A Challenge to Hakim's Preference Theory

The dependence upon the women's income in the majority of circumstances was a key and unexpected finding from this research and gave a valuable

insight into the financial pressure placed on many women to support their families or chosen lifestyles. The prevalence of sole or primary earners was unanticipated. Establishing that many families were dependent upon the woman's income gave a potential insight into the reasons behind women working full-time and raised the question of motivation and choice.

The findings in this area make a significant contribution to knowledge, as they provide a sound challenge to Hakim's Preference theory. Having identified that part-time work was not an option for the women interviewed, they were asked if they would prefer to work part-time if circumstances allowed. There was a clear divide between those who would like to work part-time and those who wouldn't. This provides a challenge to Hakim's preference theory and her classification of categories of female employees. Firstly, the women in this study are not able to fulfil their preference with regard to choosing between full-time and part-time work, they are having to engage in full-time work due to their financial circumstances. Secondly, the categories of work-centred and adaptive and the descriptions of these types of women can be challenged. Hakim (2000) describes work centred women as those who prioritise full-time work in their lives and if they choose to have children they will not be a woman's priority in life. She describes adaptive women as those who endeavour to combine paid employment with domestic and family responsibilities, usually in the form of part-time work and their engagement in work is not along the lines of pursuing a career. The majority of women in this study do not sit in either of these categories. Whilst they all work full-time pursuing careers, only 4 out of 29 of the women state that their work-life balance is more heavily weighted towards work.

Whilst a number of the women expressed a preference to work part-time, if circumstances allowed, not one of these women spoke about anything other than continuing to pursue a career whilst working part-time.

Whilst I don't dispute that there are women who are able to both follow their preferences regarding work choices and who also fit neatly into Hakim's categories, I challenge Hakim on the reality that all women are able to follow their preferences and that they can be categorised according to the number of hours they work and the priority they place on work and family life. Why shouldn't the priority of a mother working full-time be her children? (as in the vast majority of women interviewed in this study) and why shouldn't a woman want to work part-time and pursue a career?

What are the variables which enable a woman to pursue a career full-time and bring up children?

Having gathered background information from women, in order to establish to what extent personal circumstances impact upon women's ability to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children and attempted to identify specific 'enablers' or enabling factors which enable women to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children the following conclusions can be drawn.

The interaction of a number of variables impact upon a woman's ability to pursue a career full-time and bring up her children. The key variables are: the role a partner takes within the family; the ability to work flexibly and childcare arrangements. Whilst this research has concluded that the level of a woman's

education is not an enabling factor, it can be concluded that it was viewed by the majority of women as a motivating factor and something that drove them to pursue a career full-time.

The role a partner takes within the family has a significant impact on enabling a woman to bring up children and pursue a career full-time. A significant and unanticipated finding from the research was the number of households which had house husbands, enabling women to pursue a full-time career. For a variety of reasons, but mainly because the woman had more earning capacity or potential, this model made sense within the family unit. The house husband model gave the family the flexible, reliable childcare they needed and also the flexibility that the woman needed in order to work full-time. On the other hand, there were significant financial sacrifices that had been made which were putting pressure on a number of women. In addition, women lacked moral and emotional support from their partners who were no longer in the workplace themselves. In households where both partners worked, the findings showed that women do rely heavily on their partner sharing childcare responsibilities and in the majority of cases the care is shared fairly, enabling both the woman and her partner to work full-time. Where the support is not there from a partner, there is a significant other to help share childcare responsibilities, even if it is with support in dropping off and collecting from formal childcare provision.

Another key finding from this research is the evidence of the importance of flexible working in enabling women to work full-time and bring up children. Flexitime or flexible working was used by the majority of women interviewed.

The benefits of being able to work flexibly were apparent in all those who used it. In a number of cases, women specifically identified the ability to work flexibly as enabling them to pursue a full time career and bring up children. In the vast majority of cases, flexible working was used to 'cope' with being a working mother and the time was used to balance life.

Findings regarding childcare as an enabler echoed findings from the literature. Mothers need both reliable childcare and flexibility in their work roles to enable them to work full-time. Childcare was viewed by all mothers as a critical element in enabling them to return to work. Whilst this is not new information, an important message which has emerged from the research is that on top of formal, reliable and flexible childcare a woman needs a partner or significant other, such as a mother, who can help with childcare arrangements. For a woman working in a full-time, professional or senior position the hours that childcare is available are not sufficient, particularly as children get older. Without a partner, or someone extremely close to them, the challenge of trying to work flexibly to meet the needs of the position is extremely difficult. The low reliance on informal support networks for this 'additional' childcare responsibility was significant to the research. Both satisfactory childcare arrangements and a supportive partner were viewed as key enablers.

The significance of a woman's qualifications in influencing her decision to return to work full-time in a professional role and bring up children was initially a key element of this research. In light of this, it was surprising to find little in the way of consensus of opinion in the answers to this question. This would indicate that qualifications, whilst having an input into enabling a woman to reach a certain

level, were not perceived by the majority of women as a key factor in enabling a woman to work full-time. One could argue that this research showed that being educated to a certain level does not specifically enable a woman to work full-time and bring up children, unless education has enabled the women to work at a level where she can afford to pay for childcare costs to support her working full-time. Instead, education is a driver, meaning that a woman who has invested heavily in her education will be driven to utilise the education and qualifications in a full-time position. Alternatively, where a woman has proven she has the drive to study and qualify at a certain level, she possesses the same drive and determination to work full-time and bring up children.

In summary, all circumstances are different and there is not one set of factors, which, if in place, will enable women to work full-time and bring up children. All women in this research needed to work full-time and because of this were determined to make it happen and find ways to successfully combine a full-time career and motherhood. All women came up with different solutions and all had good and bad days. However, the factors which were consistently critical were the ability to work flexibly, the need for reliable childcare and additional support from a partner or significant other in order to meet the demands of the job.

A coping mechanism: prioritising and navigating conflicting demands

The third research objective was to determine patterns in strategies women have to enable them to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children. The findings from this research enable me to put forward the argument that women are constantly prioritising and navigating the conflicting demands in various facets of their lives, to enable them to pursue a career full-time and bring up

children. All women who were interviewed were realistic, within the context of wider external constraints, about what they could achieve in life. The majority of them have navigated the conflicting demands in their lives and have prioritised accordingly, in order to pursue a full-time career and bring up children. Women are realistic about what they can cope with, as well as accepting constraints around career progression, they are able to impose other constraints which assist them in coping. Women are realistic about the number of children they have and are prepared to limit this, sometimes at the expense of their maternal desires, in order to cope. Women will accept financial sacrifices, where having a house husband at home is viewed as the best option for their family situation. In summary, these women have been realistic about what they can achieve in life, at any given time, and have been prepared to compromise. Being able to accept one's limitations and being prepared to identify where priorities lie enable women to navigate their commitments and responsibilities which makes it possible to juggle and balance both a full-time career and bringing up children.

Future research

There are a number of areas for further research that this research has led me to consider.

It would be valuable to conduct a comparative study with mothers working full-time in the private sector. As previously mentioned, 26 out of the 29 women interviewed worked for the local authority. They were unanimously happy with the support they received working for a family friendly employer and with the

flexibility this offered them. With flexibility being cited as one of the key 'enabling' factors, it would be valuable to conduct a parallel study to this one, but with employees from the private sector, to ascertain the level of flexibility they were offered in their roles and if the perceived lack of flexibility of the private sector existed and the extent to which it impacted on mothers working full-time.

Whilst this piece of research intentionally focused on full-time employees, it struck me on many occasions that I was missing the voice of women who had tried to manage combining a full-time career with motherhood and had opted out. By interviewing women who had opted out of the labour market or for a part-time position, it would add a different dimension in terms of what prevented them from succeeding and which enablers were not in place.

An interesting further piece of research would be to look at the long term effects on the family unit of having a house husband arrangement, specifically around benefits to the children, relationships of adults and financial arrangements. It is worth noting at this stage that the apparent increasing trend towards men staying at home to look after the children may warrant further research into the support mechanisms both from a government and employer perspective to enable this model to be supported and work effectively for all parties.

Finally, one of the interesting findings that would warrant further research was around the area of work-life balance and categorisation of the status of work-life balance that full-time working mothers had achieved. These categories

emerged during the analysis of the findings and women fitted neatly into one of three categories in terms of work-life balance: those who had achieved a work life balance they were happy with; those whose work-life balance was heavily skewed towards their commitment to work and finally those who were struggling to achieve a work-life balance. I would be interested to identify if these categories and the ease of categorising women was unique to this research or if it this pattern was consistent across full-time working mothers.

A Final Word

This research had the potential to lead me down many avenues and at times I was tempted! As with all research, the question you set out to answer and the process of conducting the research uncovers much more than anticipated in terms of themes and material. This research, I believe, has been a valuable piece of work, not only has it answered the research question but it has provided other significant contributions in this field. I hope it is of use to others, as their research has been to me, and is a study worthy of note to policy and decision makers and employers. Finally, to women who, like me, 'cope' on a daily basis, you are not alone, even if it sometimes feels that way!

Appendix One Interview Schedule

Interview Questions

Date	
Time	
Length of Interview	
Folder / File	
Consent Form	

Personal Details / Circumstances

No / Age children	
Marital status	
Level of Educational Qualifications	
Employment – position / sector	
Terms and conditions/ No of hours a week / Flexitime / Work from Home / Term Time only etc	
Primary Earner / Dual Breadwinner couple / Secondary Earner (not dependent upon wages)	
Any other relevant information	

Areas for discussion

Exploration of reasons behind working full-time

Following motherhood, was working anything other than full-time an option you considered?

- Yes – explore circumstances, motivational aspects below
- No – explore circumstances

What motivates you to work full-time? Open question

Prompts:

- Financially / Ambition / Dedication to career / profession / Need to keep up to date / current / Self-esteem / Balance within relationship

Significance of Education

How significant is your education / qualifications in your decision to continue working full-time following motherhood?

Exploration of factors that enable you to work full –time

- Government Legislation / National Childcare Strategy
- Personal Circumstances
- Enablers / Barriers – where help can be employed
- Organisational Impact
- Work Life Balance
- Choices about Career

Government Legislation

Has the ability to Ability to take advantage of any of the following (Work and Families Act 2006) had a significant impact on your ability to work full-time?

Maternity / Adoption / Parental Leave / Flexible Working

WFTC Childcare Element /NEF 3 & 4 year olds / Employer run childcare scheme **If yes – impact/ If no – reasons behind not taking advantage, impact**

Personal Circumstances

Financial

How important is your full-time salary to you and your family? Open question Prompts: Need money / Pressure to maintain a pre-baby lifestyle meet commitments

Size and Make-up of family

How do you feel the size / make-up of your family impacts on your ability to work full-time? (number and ages of children)

Have you made a conscious decision to plan your family around your career? (ages of children / no of children)

The difference a partner can make (positive / negative impact)

Can you describe how your partner has impacted upon your ability to work full-time? Open question

Prompts: Attitude, Help and support – emotionally / childcare / domestic work
Flexibility of partner's role, Demands of partner's employment on you eg entertaining / 'wife work'

Have the attitudes of immediate family (parents / parents-in-law/ siblings) or close friends had an impact on your decision / ability to work full-time?

- **Enablers / Barriers – where help can be employed**

Childcare

Could you describe your current childcare arrangements? (formal / informal)

In your experience of using childcare, could you identify positive aspects which supported you in pursuing a full-time career and less positive aspects which have impacted negatively on your working arrangements? Prompts: Type of provider / Logistics of different childcare provision
Irregular demands / working

What do you feel is key to successful childcare arrangements?

Could you describe any informal support networks you have other than paid childcare? Family / Friends / Neighbours / Parents of children's friends

What value do you place on these support networks in enabling you to pursue a full-time career?

Other than paid childcare do you pay for any other domestic support or help?

Yes establish what they pay for /

To what extent do you feel this support enables you to work full-time?

No Do they feel that domestic help would support or not – explore reasons behind this.

What strategies do you have to balance your domestic responsibilities?

Prompt / Skimp / Organisational Skills

Work-Life-Family Balance

To what extent do you feel you've been able to achieve a successful work life balance? Explore the areas of work / children / partner / leisure time / social life

Organisational Impact

To what extent do you believe an organisation enables a woman to work full-time?

Describe the ethos of your organisation with regards to attitudes to working mothers and the impact this has on your current employment status.

Have you been able to take advantage of flexible working, describe how this has impacted on your ability to work full-time

Choice regarding Career Direction

Can you describe your career progression / direction since having your first child to date?

What conscious decisions have you made regarding your career path to enable you to work full-time?

What advice would you give to professional women to enable them to pursue a full-time career and bring up children?

Finally, with experience or hindsight would you do it differently if you had the opportunity to start again? How?

Any Other Comments?

Any Questions?

Thank you for your time – would you like a copy of the final thesis?

Appendix Two Email sent to Heads of Service

Dear All

I work within Children's Services and am currently studying for a Doctorate in Social Sciences with the University of Leicester. My thesis title is 'What enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children?' Having carried out a number of interviews, I am now struggling to find any more people who meet my criteria which is: Mothers who work full time in a senior or professional role and have at least one child under the age of 12.

If you know of anyone within your service who meets these criteria, I'd be really grateful if you would forward this email to them asking them to get in touch with me if they would be interested in participating or finding out more about what would be involved. All they would need to do is spare an hour of their time, at their convenience, to share their experiences with me.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Regards

Rebecca

Rebecca Morris

Strategic Development Officer
Extended Provision
Integrated Children's Services
Lincolnshire County Council

07776462238
01476 585915

Appendix Three

Letter sent to the University of Lincoln / Great Wood Farm Nursery

Lawn Cottage
10 School Lane
Ropsley
Grantham
Lincolnshire
NG33 4BT

8th May 2008

Dear Female Parent / Carer

Can you help me with my research?

I am writing to you to request your help with a piece of research I am doing for my Doctorate thesis. I am currently carrying out research into 'What enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children?' I am undertaking this research as part of a Doctorate in Social Sciences which I am studying for with the University of Leicester. The thesis I am undertaking aims to explore enablers and barriers which have a significant impact on a woman's ability to pursue a full-time career, alongside being a mother.

I am currently looking to interview women who meet the following criteria:

- currently working full-time in a professional or senior capacity
- returned to work full-time after taking maternity leave
- have at least one child under the age of 12

If you meet these criteria and would be kind enough to spare no more than one hour of your time to share your experiences with me, I would be extremely grateful. I would arrange to meet you at a time and place that is convenient for you. All information which you share will be treated in the strictest of confidence. All data collected will be treated in accordance with ethical codes set out in the British Sociological Guidelines.

Thank you, in advance, for considering participating in this study. If you are interested in taking part or would like further information about what it would involve, please contact me on rebecca.morris@lincolnshire.gov.uk or 01476 585915 / 07776462238.

Kind regards

Rebecca Morris

PS if you don't meet these criteria but know someone who does, I'd be really grateful if you could pass this information onto them.

Appendix Four Confirmation Letter to Interviewees

(Name)
Lincolnshire County Council
County Offices
Newland
Lincolnshire County Council
LN1 1YQ

(Date)

Dear (Name)

Informed Consent Letter

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in my research into what enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children. I greatly appreciate you giving up your time in order to help me. I am undertaking this research as part of a Doctorate in Social Sciences which I am studying for with the University of Leicester. The thesis I am undertaking aims to explore enablers and barriers which have a significant impact on a woman's ability to pursue a full-time career, alongside being a mother. The reason you have been selected to take part in this research is that you meet the following criteria:

- You currently work full-time in a professional or senior capacity
- You returned to work full-time after taking maternity leave
- You have at least one child under the age of 12.

You can withdraw from the study at any time if you feel that is necessary. If you are happy to take part in the research, however, I will ask you to sign a consent form giving your agreement. You can still withdraw from the research after signing the form.

The interview will last approximately one hour. I will ask you a series of questions and will give you the opportunity to ask me any questions you may have. I would like to reassure you that the information which you provide in the course of the interview will be treated in the strictest of confidence. All data collected will be treated in accordance with ethical codes set out in the British Sociological Guidelines. In addition, your answers will be unattributed to either yourself or any organisation which you work for or have worked for. The data gathered during the interview will only be used for my Doctorate thesis. Your own data will be completely anonymous and you will not be identifiable.

Once again, thank you very much for your participation. If you have any questions at any stage of the project please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Morris

Appendix Five Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

What enables professional women to continue to pursue their careers full-time and bring up children?

I agree to take part in an interview as part of the above named project. The research has been clearly explained to me and I have read and understood the participant informed consent letter. I understand that by signing the consent form I am agreeing to participate in this research and that I can withdraw from the research at any time. I understand that any information I provide during the interview is confidential and will not be used for any purpose other than the research project outlined above. The data will not be shared with any other organisations.

I agree that the interview can be recorded by digital voice recorder for the purpose of transcription only. YES / NO

Name: (please print)

Signature:

Appendix Six Full Profile of Interviewees

Profiles of Interviewees

	No of children	Ages	Marital Status	Ed Qual (max)	Job Level	Contracted hours	Actual hours	Uses Flexitime	Works from Home	Work all year	Type of earner
1	3	2,3,17	Married	Masters	Senior Manager	37	45	Y	Can but don't	Y	Sole Earner
2	1	5	Married	Masters	Middle Manager	37	40	Y	Occasionally	Y	Secondary
3	2	3,5	Married	Masters	Middle Manager	37	45	Y	2 days from home	Y	Dual Breadwinning Couple
4	2	1,5, 16 (step daughter)	Married	Degree	Manager	37	40	Y	2 days from home	Y	Primary
5	1	3	Married	Professional Qualification	Middle Manager	32 4days	37	Y	1 day from home	Y	Secondary
6	1	11	Married	Professional Qualification	Senior Manager	37	40 - 45	Y	No	Y	Primary
7	1	4	Married	Degree equivalent	Middle Manager	37	40	Y	Occasionally	Y	Primary
8	1	7	Divorced (living with partner)	Degree	Manager	37	45	Y	Yes sometimes	Y	Primary
9	1	3	Married	Masters	Middle Manager	35 4 days	40	Y	Yes 1 day a fortnight	Y	Primary
10	2	2, 4	Married	Degree	Senior Manager	8.30-5	8-10 hrs a day	N	Very occasionally	Y	Dual Breadwinning Couple
11	1	4	Married	Post Graduate Certificate	Professional	37	50+	N	Occasionally	Y	Dual Breadwinning Couple
12	3	7,16, 20	Married	A Levels	Manager	37.5	40-45	Y	Yes sometimes	Y	Primary
13	1	9	Divorced (engaged)	Higher National Certificate	Officer	37	40	Y	Yes sometimes	Y	Dual Breadwinning Couple
14	1	12	Single	Degree	Officer	37	37	Y	No	Y	Sole earner
15	2	5,8	Married	Post Grad Diploma	Senior Manager	37	50	Y	Yes Occasionally	Y	Primary
16	2	13,18	Married	Degree	Professional	37.5	50	Y	Yes Occasionally	Y	Dual Breadwinning Couple
17	3	2, 7,13	Married	Diploma	Middle Manager	37	40-45	Y	No	Y	Primary Earner
18	1	10	Married	GCSE	Officer	37	40-50	Y	Yes but don't tend to	Y	Primary

	No of children	Ages	Marital Status	Ed Qual (max)	Job Role	Contracted hours	Actual hours	Flexitime	WFH	Work all year	Type of earner
19	3	2 x 9, 12	Divorced (living with partner)	Degree	Middle Manager	37	41-42	Y	Yes occasionally	Y	Dual Breadwinning Couple
20	3	9,12,17	Married	Masters	Senior Manager	37	45	Y	Yes 1 day a week	Y	Dual Breadwinning Couple
21	2	10,14	Married	Degree	Senior Manager	37	50-60	Y	Yes	Y	Primary
22	1	4	Married	Degree	Senior Manager	3.5 core days	60	Y	Yes	Y	Secondary
23	1	1	Married	Degree	Manager	37	40-45	Y	1 day a week	Y	Primary
24	2	10,13	Married	Higher National Diploma	Officer	37	37	Y	Can but don't	Y	Primary
25	1	8	Single	Degree	Officer	37	40	Y	Can but don't	Y	Sole Earner
26	2	4,7	Married	Masters	Officer	37	40	Y	Yes occasionally	Y	Primary
27	7 (6 of them step children)	9,11,15, 16, 23,24, 25	Married	Higher National Certificate	Manager	37	50	y	Yes sometimes	Y	Secondary
28	2	1,5	Married	Diploma in Management Studies	Senior Manager	30	40	Y	Yes sometimes	Y	Dual Breadwinning Couple
29	2	9,14	Married	Masters	Senior Manager	37	60+	Y	No	Y	Dual Breadwinning Couple

Appendix Seven – Ethical Code of Practice Checklist

	Approaching potential participant	During initial conversation with participant	Prior to commencing interview	During the interview	Following the interview
Fully reveal identity and background					
Explain fully purpose and procedure of research					
Ascertain whether the research benefits the subjects in anyway					
Ensure the research does not harm the subject in any way					
Anticipate possible controversial findings and handle with sensitivity					
Objectivity of research					
Informed written consent sought from all participants					
Participants informed of right to withdraw from process at any time					
Participants informed of their right to feedback.					
Privacy, dignity & interests of the participant are respected during and after the process					
Total anonymity and non-traceability.					

(Adapted from Reynolds, 1979 cited in Cohen et al 2001:71)

Appendix Eight Table to record data from transcripts

	No of children	Ages	Marital Status	Ed Qual (max)	Job Level	Contracted hours	Actual hours	Uses Flexitime	Works from Home	Work all year	Type of earner
1											
2											
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Appendix Nine System for Recording Pseudonyms

Int No	Real name	Theis name	Partners real name	Partners Thesis name	Child 1 Real name	Child 1 Thesis name	Child 2 Real name	Child 2 Thesis name	Child 3 Real name	Child 3 Thesis name
1	anonymous	Caroline	anonymous	Darren	anonymous	Tanya	anonymous	Harry	anonymous	Lucy
2	anonymous	Veronica	anonymous	Craig	anonymous	Alfie	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
3	anonymous	Jane	anonymous	Martin	anonymous	Lily	anonymous	Bertie	N/A	N/A
4	anonymous	Laura	anonymous	Matt	anonymous	Jonnie	anonymous	Annabel	anonymous	Katie
5	anonymous	Danni	anonymous	George	anonymous	Rebecca	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
6	anonymous	Jessica	anonymous	Gordon	anonymous	Joshua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
7	anonymous	Sally	anonymous	Patrick	anonymous	Adam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8	anonymous	Dawn	anonymous	Andy	anonymous	Molly	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
9	anonymous	Mary	anonymous	Dom	anonymous	Archie	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
10	anonymous	Sukie	anonymous	Ian	anonymous	Bobby	anonymous	Sally	N/A	N/A
11	anonymous	Nicola	anonymous	John	anonymous	Luke	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
12	anonymous	Dianne	anonymous	Alan	anonymous	Steve	anonymous	Lucy	anonymous	Henry
13	anonymous	Carrie	anonymous	Richard	anonymous	Matthew	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
14	anonymous	Christine	N/A	N/A	anonymous	Claire	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
15	anonymous	Deana	anonymous	Simon	anonymous	Simone	anonymous	Danielle	N/A	N/A
16	anonymous	Sue	anonymous	Robert	anonymous	Craig	anonymous	Peter	N/A	N/A
17	anonymous	Angela	anonymous	Eric	anonymous	Stanley	anonymous	Georgie	anonymous	Lizzie
18	anonymous	Lauren	anonymous	Dean	anonymous	Elisa	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
19	anonymous	Joanna	anonymous	Bob	anonymous	Rosie	*anonymous	*anonymous	*anonymous	*anonymous
20	anonymous	Suzanne	anonymous	Philip	anonymous	Caroline	anonymous	Michelle	anonymous	Rupert
21	anonymous	Jenny	anonymous	Mick	anonymous	George	anonymous	Adam	N/A	N/A
22	anonymous	Lisa	anonymous	Geoff	anonymous	Natalie	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
23	anonymous	Ruth	anonymous	Callum	anonymous	Mimi	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
24	anonymous	Leslie	anonymous	Ray	Aiden	Andrew	Aimee	Anna	N/A	N/A
25	anonymous	Leanne	N/A	N/A	anonymous	Daisy	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
26	anonymous	Silvia	anonymous	Daniel	anonymous	Adie	anonymous	Ricky	N/A	N/A
27	anonymous	Frances	anonymous	Chris	anonymous	George	*anonymous	*anonymous	*anonymous	*anonymous
28	anonymous	Samantha	anonymous	Tom	anonymous	Fiona	anonymous	Ben	N/A	N/A
29	anonymous	Doreen	anonymous	Keith	anonymous	Rachel	anonymous	Naomi	N/A	N/A

Details of children kept anonymous due to ease of identification

Appendix Ten Extract from Lincolnshire County Council's (LCC) Flexible Working Policy

Introduction

LCC aims to ensure that flexible working arrangements are promoted for all employees, considered in line with the statutory obligations and implemented where operational and service conditions allow.

Objectives

LCC's objective is to:

- Implement flexible working arrangements which allow employees to be better able to balance their work, home and commitments relating to religion and belief.
- Make available part-time working at all levels, either as formal job-share or informally, subject to operational and service needs.
- Promote flexible working arrangements through information and guidance for managers and all employees.

Principles

LCC's policy with regards to flexible working arrangements includes:

- Part-time working / job share
- Flexible working hours schemes
- Voluntary reduced time schemes
- Home working / teleworking
- Part-year working
- Any other such arrangements that are agreed.

The implementation of flexible working arrangements will be subject to both operational considerations and costs measured against their potential benefits. Any decision regarding requests for introducing flexible working arrangements must be shown to be:

- Fair
- Taken in the interests of the effective running of the organisation
- Justified on non-discriminatory grounds

FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS SCHEME

Subject to operational and service needs, without prejudice, LCC operates a flexible working hours scheme for all employees.

An example of a flexible working hours scheme is shown below.

PRINCIPLES

A satisfactory service is maintained to the public during the normal hours of work.

The arrangements do not interfere with the effective operation of the Directorate / Division or the organisation as a whole.

Employees who choose to continue to work standard hours will be permitted to do so.

IMPLEMENTATION

Requests from employees to work flexible hours will be considered on an individual basis. The suitability of the post for flexible working is subject to operational and service needs without prejudice.

Working arrangements will be included as a standard item on the induction checklist for new starters.

FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS EXAMPLE SCHEME

Times

Earliest commencing time – 07.30 hours

Latest commencing time – 09.30 hours

Earliest commencing time for lunch- 11.45 hours

Minimum lunch period – 30 minutes

Latest finishing time for lunch – 14.30 hours

Earliest finishing time – 15.15 hours (subject to a minimum 2 hour afternoon)

Latest finishing time – 18.30 hours

Band time 07.30-16.30

Core time 09.30-11.45 and 14.30-15.15

Standard day 7 hours 24 minutes

Half day 3 hours 42 minutes

Time recorded to the nearest 5 minutes.

Settlement Period

Four weeks

Carry Forward

+8 or -4 in any one settlement period.

These additional hours can be converted into leave at the rate of 24 half-days per year. This leave will be subject to the normal controls for annual leave and will be booked on that card under the special leave section. Overtime can only be claimed for as under the present agreement while authorised outside normal working hours.

RECORDING

At the end of each settlement period, if more than +8 hours are accumulated only 8 hours can be carried forward. If more than -4 hours are accumulated, the employee will be required to reduce the deficit.

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