

## **Negotiating Work/Life Balance : The Experience of Fathers and Mothers in Ireland**

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Working arrangements are still not sufficiently flexible to enable parents to manage to fulfil their roles as workers and as carers and there remains a dearth of flexible working arrangements and work-life balance policies especially for fathers. This paper examines the degree of work/life balance among fathers, and mothers, employed in 5 major Irish organisations surveyed in 2002. It concentrates on the access to, and take up of, flexible working time and leave arrangements by fathers and mothers and explores the impact of such arrangements on their careers and their attitudes towards work/life balance. Parents were asked about their actual and preferred childcare arrangements. The majority of fathers were able to rely upon the provision of care by the mother in their own home - an option that was available to only a small proportion of mothers. The paper concludes by discussing the kinds of work/life balance interventions/measures sought by fathers and mothers.

The interaction between workplace and family life is becoming increasingly complex for working parents as they endeavour to balance work and caring responsibilities. The situation in Ireland is aggravated further by the fact that there is currently no statutory right to flexible working nor child-care in Ireland and public provision for the 0-3 age group is extremely limited. Working arrangements are still not sufficiently flexible to enable parents to fulfil their dual working and caring roles and work-life balance policies are often limited both in terms of organisational availability and take-up, especially for fathers. Rigid nine to five working hours have led to all kinds of problems for parents including : scheduling difficulties associated with dropping off/picking up children from crèches, childminders and schools. With over forty per cent of Irish men working 40 or more hours a week, it is not surprising

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that many feel that their employment hours are incompatible with family life.

The existing literature on fathers and fatherhood is dominated by negative/problematic issues (e.g. absence from the family) or specifically psycho/medical experience (e.g. nature/quality of contact with children). This contrasts with the greater volume and diversity of academic research on mothers/motherhood within which there is a strong strand of literature that views work/family as conflicting for women, rather than parents *per se*. There is likewise a dearth of research on how fathers “manage” work and family life. Instead the literature concentrates on the role of mothers experiencing work/family conflict and the strategies they use (e.g. part-time working) to deal with it.

This paper reviews the more limited literature on parental work/family roles showing how the labour market behaviours of fathers and mothers differ. Drawing upon the international literature, it identifies the factors that seek to explain the asymmetrical career trajectories of parents. The paper then concentrates on the analysis of empirical data on the degree of work/life balance adoption by fathers and mothers surveyed in 5 major Irish organisations in August 2002 using a mailed questionnaire. It examines the relative adoption of work/life balance arrangements through working time patterns and leave arrangements by fathers and mothers along with their current and preferred childcare arrangements. The paper then explores the impact of work/life balance arrangements on parents' careers and attitudes. The final section of the paper presents a regression model that analyses the personal characteristics of respondents (gender, age group, occupational category, location of employment and company) against their working time practices and preferences.

## **I. Background to the Parenting and Work/Life Balance Study**

The prevailing role of 20th century fathers has reflected the “breadwinner” paradigm (Drew *et al.*, 1998) in an asymmetrical relationship with “housewife/carer” partner. In recent decades, which have seen the growth in women's employment in the EU, this has been superseded by “dual participant” households where both partners are at work (Drew *et al.*, 2003). Similarly international research on fatherhood (Kimmel, 1993; Griswold, 1993) indicates an evolving role in which fathers have varying degrees and forms of involvement with their children. However, parenting roles show little signs of change across industrialised countries (Lee/Owens, 2002; Hildebrandt/Littig 2006). This role rigidity has become institutionalised into policy assumptions (e.g. mothers need maternity leave while fathers do not need paternity leave) and organisational reality (mothers, though not fathers, need to be accommodated through, for example, reduced working hour arrangements). The message conveyed in the literature suggests that fathers are work/family conflict free and only mothers experience work/family conflict (Blair-Loy/Wharton, 2004; Cousins/Tang, 2004).

Kalicki, Fthenakis, Peitz and Engfer describe the redistribution of roles and responsibilities following parenthood even among couples with almost equal levels of professional work commitment (Kalicki *et al.*, 1998). Within 18 months of childbirth «women have reduced their weekly working hours down to less than ten hours on average, while men's weekly working hours increased markedly» (Kalicki *et al.*, 1998 :4). This dyadic role-arrangement is further accentuated after the birth of an additional child. Lee and Owens ascribe this breadwinner *versus* primary care-giver dyad and attendant behaviour (strong work orientation for fathers *versus* exit from labour market or reduced hours for mothers) to men's need for self esteem and to prove their worth in response to societal pressures and the whole socialisation process (Lee/Owens, 2002). Indeed Gaylin claims that nothing supersedes work in fulfilling a man's need for pride, self respect and status (Gaylin, 1992).

Research has sought to establish the reasons for this gendered behavioural pattern. Coltrane's model cited three explanatory factors : relative resources (human capital); time availability; and gender ideology (Coltrane, 1996). Singly and Hynes also sought to address the reality of when «gender becomes more salient during the transition to parenthood and divergent parental responses» (Singly/Hynes, 2005 :379). They identified three key factors : biology (which was deemed to be short-lived); finance (which could be more important longer-term); and gender. The gender factor is further explored to expose how men and women engage with cultural ideals that define what is “good” mothering and fathering, which are commonly seen as qualitatively different (women are more care-giving). Furthermore couples seek to match the socially expected behaviours by “doing gender” (women's employment is less essential/women do not have careers). Hartmann referred to the fact that :

[...] society accepts a double standard in which mothers do much more of the parenting work than fathers. Mothers invest more of their time in caring for their children personally, take time off from work to do so and impose higher standards on the quality of their own care of children than men do. They seem to feel more guilt than men do when they work long hours. Indeed, there seems to be an ideology of intensive motherhood developing that threatens not only to rein women in and get them back in the home but also to destroy the progress our society has made in getting men more invested in their children (Hartmann, 2004 :230).

With changing gender roles evident in the labour market, the inevitable “time squeeze” has become a subject of debate (Hochschild, 1997; Milkie *et al.*, 2004). Contrary to the prediction that mothers would be more vulnerable than fathers in relation to time strain, the reverse was found to be the case. It was fathers who felt they spent too little time and experienced more time strain, with their youngest child, than mothers (O'Connell *et al.*, 2004). However this has to be placed against the

finding of Milkie, Mattingly, Nomaguchi, Bianchi and Robinson that mothers spent 50,2 hours per week with their children while fathers spent 33,4 hours (Milkie *et al.*, 2004). Not surprisingly the authors noted that the more hours parents spend in paid employment, the less time they have to spend with their children, regardless of gender. The workplace is described by Singly and Hynes as «largely structured according to the male breadwinner model, which assumes that workers do not have substantial family responsibilities» (Singly/Hynes 2005 :380).

The consequences of this “male model” are well documented both in Ireland (Drew *et al.*, 2003; O'Connell *et al.*, 2004) and abroad (Lee/Owens, 2002; Ishi-Kuntz, 2004; Milkie *et al.*, 2004; Fagnani/Letablier, 2004; Hill, 2005; Nomaguchi *et al.*, 2005; Kimmel, 2004; Kaufman/Uhlenberg, 2000). Fletcher and Rapoport noted that the “long hours, high reward” culture prevailed in the UK (Fletcher/Rapoport, 1996). Drawing upon a number of UK datasets, O'Brien and Shemilt's research showed that fathers continue to work long hours : over a third of fathers usually work 48 hours or more per week and a minority, 12 per cent, continue to work 60 hours or more per week. As O'Brien and Shemilt stated :

Whilst the economic dimension of fathering is still vital to men's behaviour and identity as parents, excessive working hours begin to reduce work-family balance satisfaction and fathers' involvement with children (O'Brien/Shemilt, 2003 :xi).

The authors also noted that while :

the gender gap in levels of economic activity over the life cycle continue to close, the volume of paid work undertaken by employed fathers remains two-thirds higher than the volume undertaken by employed mothers. O'Brien and Shemilt (2003 : 29).

The divergence in parental leave take-up is a further manifestation of the gendered responses to parenthood. International comparisons (Drew, 2005) show that in many countries parental leave is *de facto* regarded as an extension of maternity leave. Even in Nordic countries, where men's take-up of leave is higher than the EU average (Brandth/Kvande, 2001), it is noted that finance, parenting values and preferences, and workplace factors strongly override any adherence to equitable sharing of parenthood among individual couples.

There is evidence that fathers and mothers support work/life balance. O'Brien and Shemilt showed that in the UK 80 per cent of fathers and 85 per cent of mothers agreed, or agreed strongly, that everyone should be able to balance their work and home lives (O'Brien/Shemilt, 2003 :47). However this support is not reflected in the take-up of flexible working time arrangements in the UK :

Fathers' actual use of flexible working practices was generally low [...] Mothers' use of flexible working practices was always higher than fathers except in the case of shift work. The largest disparities

between the two groups [fathers/mothers] were in the use of part-time working [...] and term-time working. Fathers (66%) were more convinced than mothers (45%) that working part-time would adversely affect their career progression (O'Brien/Shemilt, 2003 :54).

Fletcher and Rapoport believe that there are complex reasons why work-family issues cannot be addressed through the sole use of a “policy and benefits” approach, particularly when this leads to a “mommy track” which further separates mothers from the archetypal ideal worker who is required to be “work primary” (Fletcher/Rapoport, 1996). They point further to family-friendly organisational efforts that inadvertently undermine gender equity by ensuring that fathers feel like they cannot avail and mothers who do avail are faced with the detrimental effects on their career prospects (Fletcher/Rapoport, 1996 :143).

This review has drawn upon a range of international sources that suggest that there are major divergences in the working lives of fathers and mothers in terms of working hours, patterns of working time, access to, and take-up of, flexible working, and consequent career paths. The remainder of this paper further explores these issues among fathers and mothers, based on a survey of employees in Ireland.

## **II. Methodology**

The objectives of the employee survey, conducted within five organisations in Ireland, were to obtain information on : how work/life balance policies and practices have/not been adopted; obstacles to their introduction/extension; and difficulties associated with their take-up. Using a printed questionnaire for self completion by individual employees, information was sought on their demographic, family, educational and occupational characteristics. The rest of the questionnaire concentrated on the working time and leave arrangements and respondents' experiences of work/life balance arrangements. It explored the impact of such arrangements on the careers of respondents and their attitudes. The survey also sought information on the degree to which employees worked longer than standard hours and, if appropriate, the reasons for this.

The questionnaire was distributed to 4300 employees in : eircom, Dublin City Council, IBM, Hibernian Life and Pensions, and ARUP Consulting Engineers. While following a similar format for all organisations, five different versions of the questionnaire were issued in August 2002 with a return date of 3 September 2002. A total of 1006 questionnaires were returned to the research team, based in the Industrial Statistics Unit, Trinity College Dublin, including 360 questionnaires from parents of dependent children who were aged under 17 years and living at home. The number of respondents and response rates, for each organisation are set out in Table 1.

Company	Sample Size	Response rate	No. of Respondents	No. of Parents
<b>ARUP Engineering</b>	400	36%	143	41
<b>Dublin City Council</b>	1,200	21%	256	110
<b>Eircom</b>	1,200	18%	219	103
<b>Hibernian</b>	500	32%	161	32
<b>IBM</b>	1,000	23%	227	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,300</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>1,006</b>	<b>360</b>

Table 1: Number of respondent and parents in companies surveyed.

### III. Survey Results

#### A. Profile of Parents

Of the 1006 respondents surveyed in 2002, 487, or 48 per cent of the total, were parents, 327 men and 160 women (Drew *et al.*, 2003). This paper concentrates on the findings relating to the 360 parents, 233 fathers (65%) and 127 mothers (35%), who had dependent children aged 17 years or under.

There were major differences in the age profile of fathers and mothers of dependent children surveyed. Only 3 per cent of fathers were aged less than 30 years compared with one-fifth of mothers. Conversely, almost two-thirds (63%) of fathers were 40 years or older, while this was the case for only one third (34%) of mothers.

Mothers accounted for 39 per cent of parents with children under 5 years, less than one-third (31%) of parents with children aged 6-12 years, but under a quarter (23%) of parents with 13-16 year old children. This pattern reflects the younger age profile of mothers, compared with fathers, in the organisations surveyed and illustrates the relatively recent rise in employment of mothers, with dependent children, in the Irish labour market. The difference between fathers and mothers with children of 13 years upwards was statistically significant (chi square 0,037).

The differences in the occupational categories in which fathers and mothers were employed were statistically highly significant (chi square 0,000). Fathers were over-represented in technical and senior management positions. Mothers held 9 per cent of the senior management occupations compared with 26 per cent of fathers. Mothers were over-represented in administrative/clerical posts (42%) compared with fathers (7%) though there were similar proportions of fathers/mothers (23%) in middle management posts.

#### B. Working Time Arrangements of Parents

The differences between the working time arrangements of mothers and fathers were statistically highly significant (chi square 0,000). Fathers worked predominantly full-time (99%), compared with 56 per cent of

mothers. Conversely, more mothers were working part-time (26%) or job-sharing (18%). This finding replicates the patterns identified among fathers and mothers in the UK (O'Brien, 2003) and international patterns.

Weekly hours worked by parents reflected these working time patterns. Fathers worked, on average, 41,63 hours per week while mothers worked 30,90 hours. Even among parents working full-time fathers worked longer weekly hours, 41,7 hours compared with 37,7 hours by mothers. More than half of the parents surveyed (57%) stated that they worked longer than standard hours. However the level was higher among fathers (64%) compared with mothers (44%).

Of the parents with dependent children aged 17 years or under, 30 per cent of fathers and two-thirds of mothers (66%) had modified their working time arrangements. These differences were statistically highly significant (chi square 0,000). Parents who had modified their working time (147) were asked whether their working time had increased or decreased after having children. Ninety per cent of mothers and 83 per cent of fathers had reduced their working time.

These adjustments have to be viewed against the high numbers/proportion of mothers working part-time/job-sharing. While 53 out of 232 fathers reduced their hours they were still working full-time compared with 56 out of 73 mothers who reduced their working time to part-time schedules. This further illustrates the gender divergence in responses to parenthood identified in the literature.

Parents were asked whether they would prefer to spend more/less time with their dependent children, using a 5 point scale from "much more time" to "much less time". No fathers or mothers wanted to spend much less time with their families and only 3 parents (2 men and one woman) stated that they would like to spend less time. Overwhelmingly parents wanted to spend more time with their offspring, including 26 per cent of fathers and 22 per cent of mothers who wanted to spend much more time. Fifty-five per cent of fathers and 47 per cent of mothers wanted to spend more time. Again these findings have to be viewed against the uneven take-up of part-time working by mothers compared with fathers.

The majority of parents (72 per cent of mothers and 70 per cent of fathers) believed that their current working arrangements suited their family/personal commitments. However, almost one-quarter of fathers (24%) and mothers (23%) felt that their working arrangements did not suit their family/personal commitments.

Parents were also asked about their preferred working time arrangements. While 99 per cent of fathers worked full-time, 8 per cent would prefer to work either part-time or job-share. More significantly (Table 2), more than nine out of ten fathers (92%) would still prefer to work full-time compared with less than one-third of mothers (31%) who,

in contrast, would have preferred to work part-time (44%) or job-share (25%).

<b>Preferred Working time pattern</b>	<b>Fathers</b>	<b>% of Fathers</b>	<b>Mothers</b>	<b>% of Mothers</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Full-time</b>	212	92%	38	31%	250
<b>Part-time/job-share</b>	18	8%	84	69%	102
<b>Total</b>	230	100%	122	100%	352

Table 2 : Preferred working time pattern of parents (n = 352).

These gendered preferred working time differences by fathers/mothers were statistically highly significant (chi square 0,000). They suggest a strong adherence to the gender role ideology of male “breadwinner” and “adapted housewife” dual role for mothers.

Among parents with partners (332), more than one-third (37%) of fathers had partners who worked full-time unpaid at home compared with only 3 per cent of mothers. Over 92 per cent of mothers had partners who worked full-time outside the home (which applied to only 29% of fathers with partners). A further one-third of fathers had partners who worked part-time outside the home, compared with only 5 per cent of mothers (Table 3). These gender differences among parents were statistically highly significant (chi square 0,000).

<b>Partner Working</b>	<b>Fathers</b>	<b>% of Fathers</b>	<b>Mothers</b>	<b>% of Mothers</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Full-time unpaid in home</b>	85	37%	3	3%	88
<b>Full-time paid outside home</b>	66	29%	96	92%	162
<b>Part-time paid outside home</b>	77	34%	5	5%	82
<b>Total</b>	228	100%	104	100%	332

Table 3 : Partners' working pattern of fathers and mothers (n = 332).

### *C. Uptake of Flexible Working Time and Leave Arrangements by Parents*

Respondents were asked to select, from a list of flexible working arrangements, those options that they had availed of. Just over one third of parents (36%) had availed of flexitime. Mothers (72) were more likely to have utilised flexitime than fathers (57). After flexitime, the next most common flexible working time arrangement was reduced hours, availed of by 3 fathers and 59 mothers. Working from home was used by 30 men and 15 women. Five fathers had also availed of other arrangements (Table 4).

This pattern replicates the findings in other studies (O'Brien/Shemilt, 2003) in showing that mothers seek, and avail of, very different work/life balance arrangements from fathers.



<b>Availed of</b>	<b>Fathers (No.)</b>	<b>Mothers (No.)</b>	<b>Total (No.)</b>
<b>Flexitime</b>	57	72	129
<b>Reduced hours</b>	3	59	62
<b>Working from Home</b>	30	15	45
<b>Term-time working</b>	5	7	12
<b>Other</b>	5	0	5

Table 4 : Flexible working time arrangements availed of by parents.

Three-quarters (76%) of the mothers (96) had availed of maternity leave compared with only 14 per cent of fathers (33) who had taken paternity leave. The level of take up of parental leave was also much higher among mothers (25%) than fathers (6%). Career breaks had been availed of by 7 per cent of fathers and 12 per cent of mothers.

Survey respondents were asked to describe their experiences, on returning from parenting leave. The comments made by parents reflect very diverse, both positive and negative, experiences. Some mothers referred to the backlog of work they faced, while others made specific comments :

#### *1. Post Maternity Leave*

Maternity leave & parental leave – promoted to manager on return. Believe this happened as a result of open-minded manager that was prepared to take a risk.

Before I left for maternity leave, I was training co-ordinator, but when I came back, I was informed they needed someone FT [full-time] for the position.

Difficult adjusting to return from maternity.

Maternity & compassionate – full support given by local managers.

On return I was allocated flexible time so I could drop off the child before starting work.

Somewhat career restricting (maternity leave). Had to take step down.

#### *2. Post Career Break/Leave of Absence*

5 yrs Leave of absence (10 yrs ago) – got my old job back but believe promotional prospects damaged by ‘lack of commitment’ demonstrated by taking this leave.

Career break for 3 years – made terrible mistake of going back to same job as I had changed, people had changed and the system had changed.

Career break – seniority lost.

These comments concerning absence (through maternity leave/career break) echo the findings of Humphreys, Drew and Murphy within the Irish Civil Service in which, despite stated policies to facilitate flexible working and uptake of leave arrangements, the perceived ethos and culture within government departments was one of disapproval by managers and colleagues (Humphreys *et al.*, 1999).

#### *D. Childcare Arrangements by Parents*

This section relates to responsibility for childcare among the parents surveyed. It also provides information on parents' preferred childcare arrangements. Table 5 shows that the most common form of childcare was provided by a partner - though this is highly gender specific. A total of 133 of fathers surveyed, but only 19 of mothers, had their child/ren cared for by their partner in their home. This finding represents a source of major inequality between fathers and mothers in the labour market.

<b>Cared for by :</b>	<b>Fathers</b>	<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Partner</b>	133	19	152
<b>Other relative</b>	22	34	56
<b>Childminder</b>	30	21	51
<b>Private crèche</b>	20	26	46
<b>Childminder after school</b>	20	26	46
<b>Work based crèche</b>	5	4	9
<b>Other</b>	12	11	23

Table 5 : Childcare arrangements used by parents

For mothers, the most common childcare arrangement was by a relative, followed by after-school care by a childminder or in a private crèche. For fathers, the most frequent arrangement (after their partner) was a childminder, relative, in a private crèche and after-school by a childminder. Only 9 parents of the 360 with dependent children used a work based crèche, while a further 23 parents had other childcare arrangements.

Parents were asked what their preferred childcare arrangements would be. The marked preference of fathers (62%) was for their partners to provide childcare, compared with only 26 per cent of mothers who would like their partners to provide this. Other preferred options were for children to be cared for in a work based crèche (21 fathers and 23 mothers) or by a relative (13 fathers and 28 mothers).

#### *E. Work/Life Balance*

One of the most important objectives of the survey was to ascertain the kinds of work/life balance sought by fathers and mothers. Respondents were asked to rank up to five of the options in order of preference (Table 6). Hence the lower the average score, the higher the ranking. The most

sought after preference among parents was for more flexible full-time hours (2,01 ranking), followed by reduced working hours (2,40 ranking) and working from home (2,40 ranking).

It is evident that mothers and fathers have different preferences. Fathers had a stronger preference for full-time flexible hours whereas mothers ranked the availability of reduced hours highest. Fathers ranked working from home as their next preference while for mothers it was their third preference, after flexible (full-time) working. There was more consistency in the lower preference for childcare supports by both fathers and mothers.

	<b>Fathers</b>	<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Flexible (full-time) working arrangements</b>	1.85	2.36	2.01
<b>Availability of reduced hours</b>	2.77	1.91	2.40
<b>Working from home</b>	2.29	2.59	2.40
<b>State subsidised pre-school childcare</b>	2.76	2.97	2.83
<b>State provision of after-school hours care</b>	3.03	3.15	3.08
<b>Childcare support measures by employer</b>	3.12	3.11	3.12

Table 6 : Ranked preference for improving work/life balance by parents  
(1 = most important and 5 = least important).

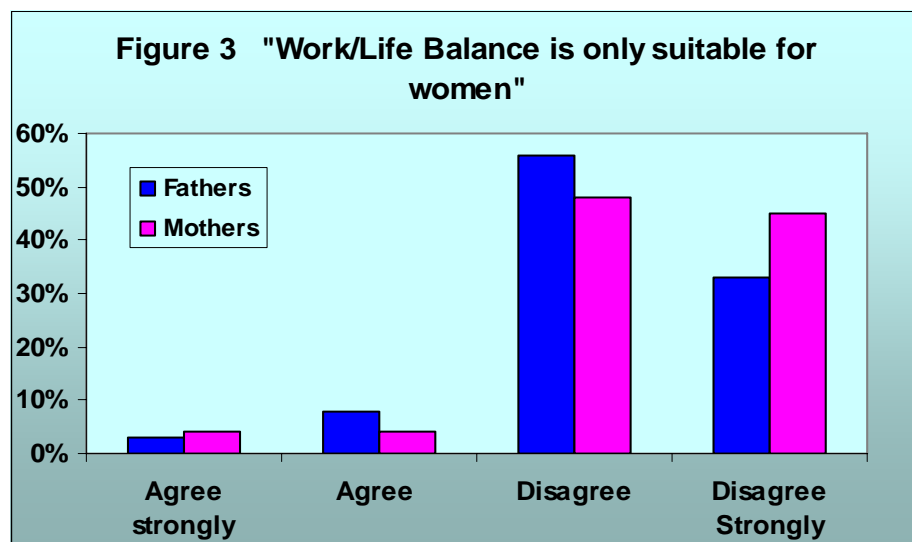
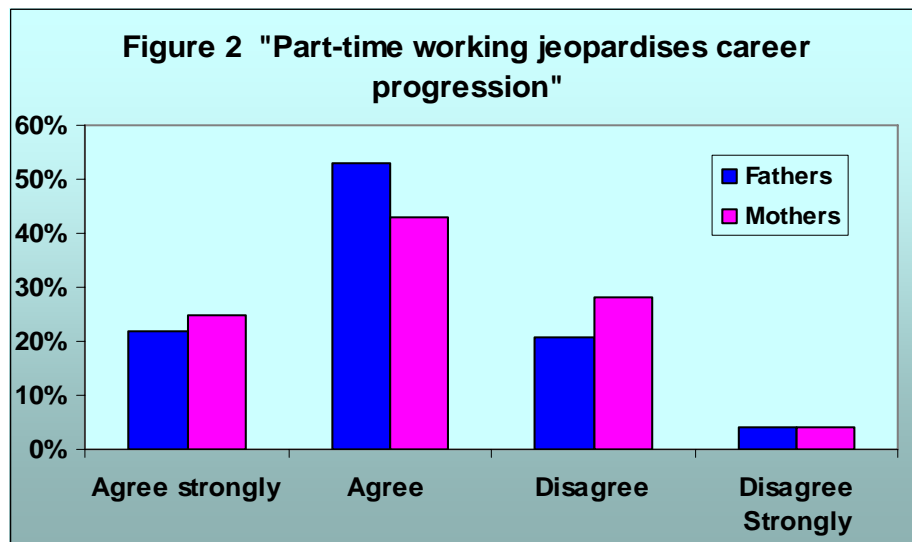
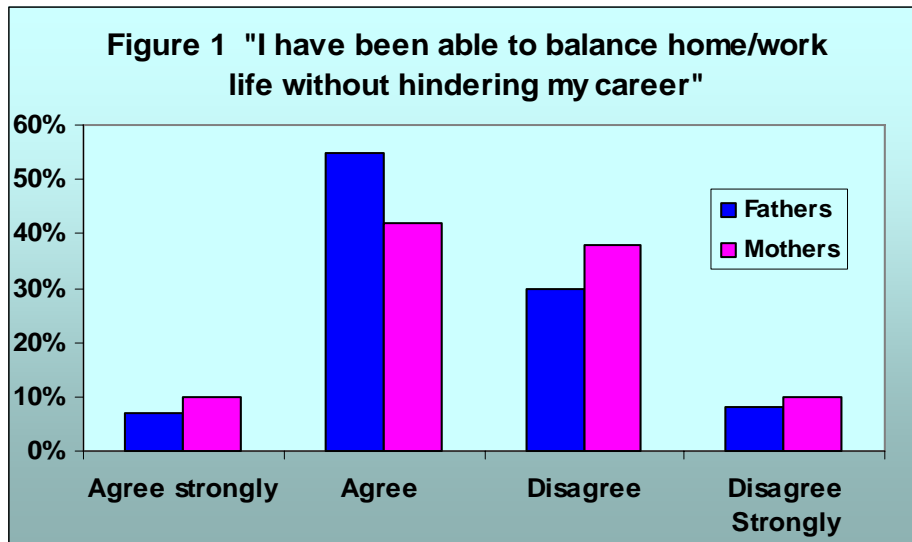
This further reinforces the gender divide in the take-up of flexible working arrangements in that fathers and mothers have difference perceptions of, and preferences for, work/life balance options.

#### *F. Attitudes to Current Working Life*

Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement with a series of statements. The first was “I have been able to balance home and work life without hindering my career progression” (Figure 1).

More fathers (55%) agreed with this statement compared with mothers (42%), suggesting that mothers find it more difficult than fathers to balance home/work without impeding their career.

Figure 2 sets out the responses by parents to the statement “Part-time working jeopardises career progression”. In this it is clear that there was a strong agreement on the part of fathers and mothers that working part-time jeopardises career prospects. Three-quarters of fathers agreed (53%) or agreed strongly (22%) with the statement while more than two thirds of mothers also agreed (43%) or agreed strongly (25%). Only a minority of parents did not believe that working part-time jeopardises career progression (25% of fathers and 32% of mothers). Despite these prevailing negative views, almost half of mothers surveyed were working part-time or job-sharing.



The most adamant and negative responses were made in relation to the statement "Work/life balance is only suitable for women" (Figure 3). Only 12 per cent of the fathers believed that work life balance was not

suitable for men compared with 7 per cent of mothers who agreed with the statement. Overall 88 per cent of fathers and 93 per cent of the mothers disagreed (including 33% of fathers and 45% of mothers who disagree strongly) with the statement.

#### **IV. Simultaneous Effects of Parents' Personal Characteristics and Working Practices**

This paper has examined the work/life balance arrangements, through working time patterns and leave take-up, by fathers and mothers along with their current and preferred childcare arrangements. It explored the impact of work/life balance arrangements on parents' careers and attitudes by analysing parents' personal characteristics (gender, age group, occupational category, location of employment and company) against the working time practices and preferences.

In order to explore the effects of a number of independent variables, other than gender (recoded as 1 for fathers and 0 for mothers), on dependent variables relating to parental practices and preferences, a multiple regression model was constructed to measure the simultaneous effects of organisation (5 companies), location (6 cities), education (9 levels ranging from primary school leavers to holders of Masters degree/other qualification), occupation (8 occupational categories), age (6 groups) and presence of children (aged < 5 years, 6 to 12 years and 13 to 16 years) on average working hours, working time arrangements (full-time *versus* part-time), preferred working time pattern (full-time *versus* part-time) and whether or not parents had adapted their working time after having children. The model also tested these independent variables on a number of attitudinal statements which all proved to be insignificant.

The results of the regression analysis for working patterns and preferences are presented in Table 7. The effect of gender was highly significant for predicting actual and preferred working time patterns. In both cases fathers were less likely than mothers to work other than full-time or to aspire to such an alternative working arrangement. As was already noted, average hours were higher for fathers than mothers and men were less likely to have modified their hours from the full-time norm after having children.

After gender, the strongest determinants of working time arrangements were the correlated occupational category and educational level. This would be expected since longer hours were worked by senior and middle level managers, whose education level was highest, compared with unskilled manual employees who worked shorter average hours and were less well educated. Parental location was positively correlated with having modified working time suggesting that this is harder for parents living/working in Dublin than in other smaller cities. This may reflect the need for higher incomes by parents whose mortgages would reflect higher house prices in Dublin compared with other locations. As anticipated, the

presence of one or more children aged less than 5 years was associated with modifying working time.

Overall, reduced working time after having children was associated with being a mother and working outside of Dublin. It was less common among parents with high educational attainment and those without pre-school-going children. No other independent variables (age and organisation) proved to be significant in determining working time arrangements.

	Dependent Variables			
Independent Variables	Work time pattern	Preferred work time pattern	Average hours worked	Modified working time after children
	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Beta</i>
Gender	-.61**	-.66**	.56**	.35**
Occupational Category			-.2**	Not Significant
Location				.12*
Educational Level				-.19**
Children <5				-.18*
$R^2$	0.377	0.43	0.349	0.27

Table 7 : Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting working time patterns and preferences. \*Significant at 90% confidence interval \*\* Significant at 95% confidence interval.

## V Key Findings

The survey results indicate that the occupational profile of fathers and mothers in the same five organisations was different, with more women in administrative/clerical posts and virtually absent from crafts/manual while men were over-represented in management, especially at a senior level, and in technical positions.

While most parents believed that their current working arrangements suited their family/personal life there was evidence of “long hours” as a standard working arrangement. More than half of the parents surveyed, particularly fathers, worked longer than standard hours.

Mothers were more likely to utilise flexitime than fathers. The next most important flexible working arrangement was working from home which more fathers than mothers utilised. Working reduced hours was the third most popular flexible option and availed of almost exclusively by mothers.

The most common form of childcare arrangement for fathers was by their partner, but this was not the case for mothers. Fathers preferred their partners to provide childcare, but this was true for only a small number of mothers. This reinforces the major inequality that exists between male and female parents in the labour market.

After flexible full-time hours, parents sought access to reduced hours and working from home. Parents ranked state subsidised pre-school, after-school care and employer childcare support as less important. Mothers and fathers had different preferences with fathers seeking full-time flexible hours as their first/second choice, compared with mothers who rated this as their second choice after reduced hours. Working from home was more appealing to fathers than mothers.

The majority of parents agreed that they were able to balance home and work, without hindering their careers. However there was strong agreement from fathers and mothers (many of whom worked reduced hours) that part-time working jeopardizes career progression. More positively, the vast majority of fathers and mothers disagreed with the statement that work/life balance was only suitable for women.

Mothers and fathers had divergent preferences in relation to both childcare and work/life balance arrangements. Men preferred that childcare be provided by their partner in the family home, while mothers preferred to have a relative mind their children. Fathers prioritised flexible full-time hours and working from home while mothers wanted access to reduced working hours.

Gender was significant in predicting actual and preferred working time patterns since fathers were less likely than mothers to work other than full-time or to aspire to such an alternative working arrangement. Average hours were higher for fathers than mothers and men were less likely to have modified their hours from the full-time norm after having children.

Overall reduced working hours after having children was associated with being a mother and working outside of Dublin. It was less common among parents with high educational attainment and those without pre-school-going children.

This analysis of the working patterns and preferences of fathers and mothers suggests that despite increasing participation and adaptability on the part of dual role working mothers, there has been little progress towards dual roles for working fathers. Indeed the Irish evidence presented here upholds the observation in relation to the UK : «The ever-increasing part-time, casual, sometimes home-based employment of women has reinforced, rather than reduced, economic inequalities between the sexes» (Segal, 1997 :38). Coltrane also noted that «the continued symbolic significance of intensive mothers and breadwinner fathers serves to reproduce unequal gender relations at a time when gender equality is gaining acceptance» (Coltrane, 2004 : 216). How much of this is involuntary and can be attributed to (a) pre-ordinal societal expectations of men's roles and masculinity; (b) rigidities in the “male” model of work; and/or (c) adherence to a replication of gendered behaviour by parents over generations ? The evidence in this paper replicates that found in other studies (Bacik/Drew, 2006) and suggests that while the majority of Irish fathers continue to have partners who are

willing to be at home full or part-time to raise their children the current asymmetrical family roles will be perpetuated.

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