

Squaring the Circle? Work and Family Issues among Owners of Small Business Enterprises in Ireland

This paper addresses the largely under-researched theme of how entrepreneurs in Ireland manage their business lives in parallel with their family commitments, with specific reference to dependent children. Since the emergence of dual earner couples as 'typical', there has been an expanding attention to the working lives of parents and the issue of work-family conflict in the context of employment. This strand of literature sought to explain patterns of working, e.g. sector of employment, hours of work and flexibility, in terms of highly gendered preferences. The discourse has moved from woman/mother/family-friendly to more gender neutral work-life balance (WLB), in tracking the responses of organisations to the needs of their employees, in the broader context of ability to provide family care. Some research examined both sides of the 'reconciliation' divide by surveying the needs of employers and employees (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003; Drew et al, 2003). These and subsequent studies noted that even in organisations with well developed policies in place, take-up of WLB arrangements was highly gendered and associated with lower level occupations (clerical/administrative). It has been further observed that, in an Irish context, managers fail to lead by example (Drew and Murtagh, 2005) and often adopt a gatekeeping role in the practice and availability of WLB arrangements for themselves and their staff (Drew and Daverth, 2009). With the growth of smaller enterprises a gap is evident in our knowledge of how entrepreneurs behave in their unique multi-functional roles (as owner employer/employee), particularly when they become parents.

Managers in employment frequently propound their need for WLB in their own lives and those of their staff, however they rarely champion flexible working by working part-time or availing of family related leave themselves. Indeed it has been demonstrated that long hours, in employment, are a perceived necessary hallmark of management, and advancement within management ranks. By implication therefore, any deviation towards flexible working by employees can be construed as demonstrating a lack of commitment to their careers. This rigidity in the culture of management (Drew et al, 2003; Humphreys et al, 1999) contributes to the glass ceiling effect that deflects women from aspiring to, or progressing within, the management track.

While there is a growing understanding of these issues in employment, they have seldom been considered within the context of entrepreneurship. With the rising importance of

entrepreneurship throughout developed economies, it is important to investigate the degree to which WLB arrangements are created by small business owners. This is especially relevant in an Irish context given the much lower levels of female entrepreneurship compared to other EU countries. Therefore questions of interest include: do small business owners replicate the HR practices of larger employers, which contribute to gender segregation? Or do entrepreneurs create and avail of alternative working practices that are better suited to WLB? Can running SMEs offer parents a means of better reconciling working and family roles? If so, are there gender differences in the degree of adherence to long hours versus flexible working patterns of entrepreneurs?

Evidence from the literature on women holding management posts in larger organisations suggests that, in response to role conflicts, a higher proportion of women than men exit from the employment sphere in order to escape from the 'family-hostile' cultures of many private and public sector organisations. Some of these women take time out to spend with their children while a small, but growing, proportion gravitate to setting up small businesses to allow them to manage their conflicting schedules and spend more time at home/with their child(ren). Are such strategies evident among Irish entrepreneurs? This paper focuses on work family issues among small business managers and entrepreneurs in Ireland, with a particular attention to their status as parents.

Background

In order to understand the conditions prevailing in Ireland, a brief outline is presented of some key demographic and labour market changes along with current levels of entrepreneurship, that form a backdrop to the survey of entrepreneurship among parents of dependent children.

Since the 1970s, Ireland has experienced a major shift from a predominantly agrarian economy to a fast growing service led economy. Ireland's entry to the European Union in 1973 marked a transition towards EU norms in terms of fertility rates, rising female labour force participation, accompanied by higher levels of educational attainment by women.

In 1970, Ireland's Total Fertility Rate was 3.87 (Fahy, 2001), the highest rate in the EU, due to the strong influence of the Catholic Church over personal morals and on the political system:

contraception, divorce and abortion¹ were still illegal. Following the legalisation of contraception, the fertility rate dropped to levels comparable to other EU member states (1.93 in 1997). During the last decade, fertility has risen to 2.01 in 2008 which saw the highest number of births (75,000) in the state since 1898, in parallel with a rise in the age of mothers at first birth from 27.5 years in 1955 to 28.9 years in 2008 (CSO 2010).

Alongside demographic changes, Ireland has experienced a feminisation of education most notably in secondary and tertiary rates of educational attainment. The proportion of the population aged 25-34 years with a third level qualification is 51 per cent among women compared with 39 per cent for men. Furthermore, only 9 per cent of young women leave the secondary school system early while 14 per cent of young men drop out of school before gaining a secondary qualification (Lunn et al, 2009).

The extraordinary economic growth witnessed in Ireland since the mid-1990s (up to 2008), has been a major factor in women's rising labour market representation. By 2008, Ireland's female employment rate had met/exceeded the Lisbon target of 60 per cent. This is in strong contrast to the female participation of 28 per cent in 1971, when married women were forced out of paid employment due to the existence of the 'marriage bar'² which prohibited their participation throughout the public sector and in many private companies. Despite the abolition of the marriage bar in 1973, women's participation in the Irish labour market remained well below the EU average until the 1990s.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2009) report for Ireland 2007, the rate of entrepreneurial activity among men has always been higher than for women and a gender gap exists. However the GEM data show that while the percentage of men engaged in early stage entrepreneurial activity has been relatively stable (10.6% in 2007) the percentage for women has increased to 5.9 per cent, from 4.2 per cent in 2006. This remains lower than in the US (7.2%). The report flags the factors inhibiting entrepreneurial growth in Ireland which affect

¹ While contraception and divorce have since been legalised, abortion remains illegal in Ireland.

² The Marriage Bar required that women leave paid employment on getting married. It applied mainly to women's white-collar occupations, in both the public and private sector. In Ireland, where labour surpluses have been larger and more long-standing than in most countries, it persisted until the marriage bar was abolished in the public sector in 1973, and discrimination in employment on grounds of sex was made generally illegal in 1977.

women's start-up prospects to a greater extent than men's: fewer women (29%) have a circle of acquaintances who are in business compared with men (49%); more men (56%) are confident about starting/running a business compared with women (42%); perceptions of good business prospects are higher among men (50%) than women (42%) and fear of failure is also higher among women (40%) than men (35%). The GEM predict that if more women were involved in early stage entrepreneurship, the rate at which people are setting up new businesses in Ireland would begin to rival that of the US.

Having briefly outlined the altered demographic, educational, economic and entrepreneurial context in Ireland, the next section reviews the international literature on entrepreneurship and family. This examines the existing literature and identifies a gap in the gendering of family-work conflict and how this is addressed (or not) by men and women who run small businesses.

Literature Review

Early research on entrepreneurship, as in management, assumed a 'male norm' which ignored any work/business interaction with home/family. The exceptions to this explored family in the context of generational change and the transfer of leadership and ownership within families. The next main body of research concentrated on work-family conflict, usually from the perspective of mothers running/owning SMEs. By the 1990s the theme of Work-Life Balance, and whether entrepreneurship offered women a way of achieving it, became hotly debated.

Compared with the literature on work-family in the employment context, there has been relatively little research on work-family issues among entrepreneurs and what does exist is based mainly on experience in the US and other non-EU states such as Australia, Israel, South Africa and New Zealand (Smith, 2000; Lerner et al. 1997; Schindehutte et al. 2003; Dupuis and de Bruin 2004). Research into family and entrepreneurship stemmed initially from establishing the motivation for business start-up and the influence of 'family' connections in spurring business creation and providing support and labour inputs. Having a parent or sibling in business has been noted as a very positive factor in embarking on entrepreneurship (Dyer and Handler, 1994) and may contribute to the viability and/or growth of a family business. There remains a major lacuna in research that examines running a small enterprise ownership in the context of rearing of young children and their mutual implications.

With the global surge of women-led business start-ups it became necessary to address this research deficit. Hence the next strand of publications that explored women's two *conflicting* roles of work and family. In recognition of their shift from home-based to work-based production, this research assumed that only women experience conflict in their dual roles.

Work-Family Conflict

Stoner et al (1990) located the critical problem of the tension between personal life and career pursuits as a specifically female one, explained in terms of "interrole conflict". The authors emphasised the lack of research into this topic: "to date, most entrepreneurial and small business studies have not fully explored the variables influencing work-home role conflict. The existing work-family role conflict literature has a distinctive non-entrepreneurial slant, in that it deals with women who are employees rather than owners/managers, and often employs samples that are predominantly male" (Stoner et al 1990: 30).

In their exploratory study of 300 female business owners in the US, Stoner et al. (1990) showed that time pressures (in the form of long working hours) and family size (younger children) and support (from family – most notably their partner) were among the key variables affecting work-home role conflict. "Husbands are often nonsupportive, and may even be obstructive to the careers of their entrepreneurial wives" (Stoner et al 1990: 31). Furthermore the authors noted that the demands of their family role were permitted to intrude into the work role of mothers in business. For men, the opposite was true. Their findings support the belief that female SME owners experience significant interference from, or conflict between, work and home roles. The authors also showed that marital status, number of children and hours worked are not significantly related to work-home role conflict. They ascribe this apparent contradiction to the fact that in running small businesses the women have autonomy and control that "may permit them to structure time to accommodate many dimensions affecting work-home conflict" (Stoner et al 1990: 38).

According to Kim and Ling (2001) work-family conflict can be allocated to three broad categories (job-parent conflict; job-homemaker conflict and job-spouse conflict), with some work undertaken on the first category. However, where children are considered to be a significant factor, research has concentrated on women only, rather than entrepreneurial men or parents. Work by Bowen and Hisrich (1986) in the US traced the emergence of the female entrepreneur using a career development perspective. They highlighted the limitations of earlier research in

terms of its use of small samples and over-reliance on cross-sectional studies. Noting the lack of even basic demographic information on women small business owners, the authors pointed to a Texas based research showing that female entrepreneurs rated their business as a higher priority than their family. Support for this contention comes from Bourne's (2006) US based study of 10 women entrepreneurs. Contrary to Stoner et al (1990) who suggested that women allow family to infiltrate business life, the women in Bourne's (2006) study demonstrated primacy to the work sphere.

Aldrich and Cliff (2003) stressed that family and businesses are inextricably linked and urged entrepreneurship scholars to adopt a *family embeddedness* perspective on new venture creation, in recognition of the changes in North American's family system. This dynamic focus acknowledges the shifts that can occur during a life course via changing roles and relationships reflecting the "interweave of work, family, and community role trajectories, the interdependencies of paths among family members, and the changing circumstances and options of both families and family businesses" (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003: 579). The authors traced how changing demographics, most notably in family composition, have implications for the emergence and recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities, for example in stimulating new ventures arising from divorce or other family disruptions. Aldrich and Cliff (2003) also emphasised how women's changing roles (from home to market based work) have stimulated new enterprises. In response to the rise in dual income couples with young children, new products and services have emerged to fill demand e.g. childcare, processed meals, housecleaning (to which internet online shopping/home delivery might be added). In the authors' view (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003) the lingering adherence to the division of labour whereby women continue to have primary responsibility for household chores and childcare even when employed, represents an impediment to the emergence and growth of women-led businesses.

Motherhood and entrepreneurship were explored by Schindehutte et al (2003) who compared the impacts on children of combining parenting and business in South Africa and US, but their research largely ignored issues related to fatherhood and entrepreneurship. The study showed that while women-owned businesses are disruptive to family life, children did not resent this. For Schindehutte et al (2003: 104) the entrepreneurial mother can be viewed as a positive role model as a testimony to "the ability of female entrepreneurs to achieve work-family balance".

Shelton (2006: 285) utilised a conceptual framework to predict the effectiveness of strategies for “structurally reducing work-family conflict by manipulating roles, given the salience of work and family roles and resources available to the female entrepreneur”. Shelton (2006) places emphasis on work-family management strategies and how these can contribute to the performance and growth of women-led businesses. In outlining appropriate strategies, such as delegating of venture roles through participative management practices and team building, in common with other researchers, Shelton concentrated solely on women-owned business and ignored the behaviour of male partners and entrepreneurs as agents in sharing the responsibilities associated with family care and domestic work. If only women are engaged in addressing work-family conflict (which may even lead them to embark upon entrepreneurship as a coping strategy) this leaves the business world as a male-dominated domain where men need not take on/share responsibility for vital activities that occur outside the business.

Work/Life Balance

An emerging theme in employment and entrepreneurial research during the 1980s was Work-Life Balance. Some early studies examined this as an issue of concern for both male and female business owners (Honig-Haftel and Martin, 1986; Goffee and Scase, 1983), but the topic quickly became relegated to a “woman’s issue.” For example, one study examined time use patterns and the use of household help by self-employed women, suggesting that increased responsibility for family can provide some explanation for the lower profitability of women’s firms (Longstreth et al, 1987).

Since these early studies, achieving better WLB has been systematically associated with motivations and obstacles to female entrepreneurship. In the context of internet growth, for instance, Abarbanal (2008) highlights the economic conditions in which women are exiting from the constraints of traditional corporate jobs in order to create enterprises. Reasons cited for this exodus relate to: freedom and flexibility, desire for challenge and personal achievement, giving rise to the (derogatory) term ‘mompreneurs’ to facilitate: “creating home-based activities that would allow them control over their time so they could be more available to their young families” (Abarbanal 2008: 32). Women’s exodus to entrepreneurship was also noted by Buttner and Moore (1997) who claimed that Work-Life Balance emerged among the top four motivators to set up businesses, based on a study involving 129 women in the US who completed a survey questionnaire and attended focus group sessions. Based on a Canadian study, Fenwick (2002)

also saw WLB as a positive factor influencing women's choice to enter business enterprise by allowing them more freedom and control over their lives.

Work by Dupuis and de Bruin (2004) referred to blurring of the boundaries and the way work and life traverse which are not captured in WLB. They challenged the appropriateness of the concept for SME owners, due to the significant personal and business restraints facing them. The authors acknowledge that SMEs could more readily implement flexible policies due to less role specialisation and staff who would be more likely to multitask. Yet the authors point out that WLB policies remain more closely associated with larger organisations.

One study explored *both* women and men entrepreneurs in terms of similarity and difference. Among their sample of entrepreneurs drawn from US MBA alumni, DeMartino and Barbato (2003) found that a higher proportion of women become entrepreneurs in order to balance work and family while a higher proportion of men sought wealth creation and/or economic advancement. These gender differences are greater among married entrepreneurs with dependent children. According to DeMartino and Barbato (2003: 816), "entrepreneurship as a career can offer a degree of flexibility and balance that some other careers do not offer". Further support for this comes from Still and Timms (2000) using focus groups with 63 women owners of small businesses in Australia. Their participants were motivated to start a business because of lifestyle issues i.e. flexibility and ability to balance work with their relationships and family. Similar findings were noted by Maysami and Goby (1999) for female entrepreneurs in Singapore.

Posig and Kickul (2004) claim that work/home trade-off for men is "bi-directional" but only "uni-directional" for women. Faced with inter-role conflict, men in their study adjusted one domain to compensate for the other, while women aimed to ensure that while family involvement could impinge on work, the reverse was not allowed to happen. Hence the double/triple shift for women. The authors found that men were primarily motivated by financial imperatives (money, financial security) rather than WLB among those with dependants, while for women with dependents, WLB and lifestyle flexibility were the most important motivations for business ownership. The authors voice caution about small business ownership as an alternative to mainstream employment for women since according to their findings it "may well give them occupation, but does not necessarily give them the financial security that paid employment

does” (Posig and Kickul, 2004: 270). Furthermore such women were still responsible for domestic tasks, drawing into question the achievement of WLB and business success.

Walker et al (2008) also explored the attraction of small enterprise ownership as a solution to achieving WLB. Their study reports on a survey of men and women running home-based businesses in Western Australia showing that while gender was not the major determining factor, having dependent children did influence female business owners towards seeking flexibility via business start-up. Walker et al (2008: 259) acknowledged that “although men and women both experience inter-role conflicts, it is often more difficult for women to balance their work and home roles”.

The search for WLB via entrepreneurship was explored, in the context of New Zealand, by Kirkwood and Tootell (2008), based on interviews with 32 women and 26 men. Like Walker et al (2008), they are cynical about the view that entrepreneurship might be the much sought after panacea for WLB. Their study addresses work-family conflict in an entrepreneurial setting and explores how entrepreneurs experience work-family conflict and their strategies for WLB. “The impact of children for women entrepreneurs is significant in their desire to achieve work-family balance” (Kirkwood and Tootell, 2008: 288), arising from women’s major role in childcare and household management. Their study showed that starting a business did not resolve the problem for women in achieving a desired flexibility in relation to work and family – which, in their view, may be unattainable.

Overall, the existing literature highlights some important gaps in our understanding of family and small business management. The shift from ignoring women-led business to looking at women-led business in isolation from men-led enterprises demonstrates the need to examine how family interacts with business life and the ways that male *and* female owners deal with the potential conflicts, in order to understand the requisite supports for existing, or budding, small enterprises. The literature also suggests that other factors, in themselves important proxy markers of family structure, such as marital or parental status, need to be taken into account in further work.

Hence this paper examines how mothers and fathers assign their time in their business and family lives and the degree to which they have experienced conflict and/or made sacrifices due to work-family demands. Through the study of male and female entrepreneurs with dependent

children in Ireland, it illustrates the degree to which flexible working exists in their businesses and the division of labour in their households. The overarching emphasis is on identifying gendered patterns that can be analysed in terms of showing the kind of behavioural shifts that would support more equitable sharing of family/household responsibilities and hence access to business venture creation and growth, for women and men.

Survey Methodology

This paper draws upon data collected in a national survey of entrepreneurship conducted³ to obtain information on men and women entrepreneurs. The total sample size for the survey was 3498 entrepreneurs, 924 men and 2574 women, of whom 832 (23%), responded. Of these responses, 440 respondents (207 men and 233 women) had dependent co-resident children. This analysis focuses on the responses of entrepreneurs who were parents of dependent children aged less than 18 years.

The mainly quantitative data collected were analysed using SPSS. Since most of the variables were categorical, Pearson's chi square test was used, where appropriate, to test for any statistically significant differences in the responses of fathers and mothers. The key measures included: working time arrangements; allocation of childcare within entrepreneurial households; the extent to which respondents and their employees availed of flexible working practices; and the interferences/sacrifices experienced among SME owners in relation to business versus caring demands. In addition, all measures were examined in the context of sex, hours worked, number of dependent children, ability to delegate childcare to another parent and involvement in childcare, using ordinal logistic regression modelling.

The remainder of this paper concentrates on the intersection of work-family in the lives of Irish entrepreneurs with dependent children in terms of: working time arrangements of business owners and their own employees; experiences of conflict between work and family; sacrifices made in relation to time spent with partner, children and friends; and the divisions of labour in the domestic sphere between housework, childcare and leisure.

³ The sampling frame used for this survey consisted of 3498 organisations. To give an indication of the reach of this survey, Eurostat (2006) estimates the number of entrepreneurial organisations in Ireland at the time of sending out the survey at approximately 320,000 organisations, while the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2005) provides a figure of approximately 250,000 'established' organisations for that period.

Findings

This section outlines the profiles of the survey respondents in terms of demographic characteristics, sector of business and family status. It goes on to examine the working time patterns of business owners and their employees. The major focus is on the degree to which entrepreneurs experience conflict between work and family; have made sacrifices in relation to time spent with partner/children/friends; and the divisions of labour in the domestic sphere between housework, childcare and leisure.

In order to draw conclusions about the issues of work and family and how these are handled by entrepreneurs in Ireland, this paper addresses the following questions:

- How do small business owners allocate their working and non-working time?
- Do these replicate or address work-family conflict in employment?
- Is achieving WLB a priority among small business owners?
- Are there gender differences in the responses to WLB for themselves and their employees?
- To what degree have entrepreneurs experienced interferences from, and/or made sacrifices in relation to, their personal/family lives, in order to grow their businesses?
- Who is responsible for housework/childcare in business owners' homes?

Profile of Entrepreneurial Parents

Of the 440 entrepreneurs in this analysis who had a dependent child/ren, 207 were fathers (47%) and 233 mothers (53%). Three-quarters of mothers were aged less than 45 years while 63 per cent of fathers were in this age range. However, age differences of fathers and mothers were not statistically significant. The majority of parent entrepreneurs were married or living with a partner (91%), though this applied more to fathers (94%) than mothers (82%). There were no significant gender differences in the percentages of mothers and fathers with dependent children under 6 years of age, aged 6-12 years and 13-18 years.

Fathers had been involved in their enterprise for an average of 13.4 years while the average for mothers was 12.7 years. There were major sectoral differences among entrepreneurs with dependent children. These differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Women entrepreneurs predominantly traded in professional services, catering, education or tourism while men were concentrated in manufacturing, construction, agriculture and fisheries and

transport, thereby reflecting the highly gender-segregated sections of the economy. These findings are consistent with SME ownership in Ireland and the EU (GEM, 2009).

Also consistent with the different sectors of trading, fathers employed a much higher percentage of male staff (68%) compared with mothers (26%). In accordance with GEM (2009) patterns in Ireland, in which 27 per cent of women entrepreneurs set up in business to create a job for themselves (compared with 19% of men), mothers were less likely than fathers to have full-time staff, and when they did they employed fewer of them. This points to a very important structural difference in the composition of entrepreneurial mothers' and fathers' businesses that may affect aspects of their entrepreneurial experience, including those examined in this paper. It is therefore fundamental to consider the findings of this study in light of this structural difference and employment patterns, which are themselves highly gendered. With this in mind, the analysis now compares the entrepreneurial experiences of mothers and fathers.

Childcare Arrangements

Major, and statistically significant, differences ($p < 0.01$) are evident in the childcare arrangements used by fathers and mothers running SMEs. More than half of the fathers who were entrepreneurs (56%) relied on their partners to care for their child/ren, compared with only 21 per cent of mothers ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, one-third of mothers (34%) were responsible for providing care for their child/ren ($p < 0.01$). Private childcare arrangements were used by 37 per cent of mothers but only 24 per cent of fathers ($p < 0.01$); a baby-sitter or domestic worker provided childcare for 25 per cent of mothers and 18 per cent of fathers ($p < 0.05$). The remaining childcare was by family members (other than partners) for 19 per cent of mothers and 13 per cent of fathers, but the gender differences were not statistically significant.

This major gender divergence in childcare arrangements may help to explain some of the other differences noted among entrepreneurs – namely the greater demand for flexible working hours by mothers, as distinct from fathers, and the stronger likelihood of a child(ren) interfering with the business ventures of mothers. The fact that relatively few fathers provided the primary care for their child(ren) and that more than half of them could rely on their partner to provide this has serious implications for the ability of some parents to commit fully, or even partially, to running and developing their businesses. In contrast to these fathers, a substantial minority (14%) were responsible for childcare alongside running a business.

Working Hours

The working hours of the 440 parents in the sample averaged 49 per week, well above the weekly hours for employees in Ireland. However fathers worked in excess of 55 hours while mothers worked just under 44 hours per week. The main reasons for working longer than standard hours were: backlog of work; own desire to get job done and temporary increase in workload. There were no significant differences between the reasons given by mothers and fathers.

Given the major commitment to their businesses, as measured by working hours, alongside family demands, parents were asked to cite the degree to which they had experienced conflict in their personal/family lives.

Role Conflict

International literature on women and entrepreneurship has flagged the continuing problem that women (though not men) face when setting up enterprises, particularly when juggling with raising children. Figure 1 illustrates that, in accordance with previous findings, it is women who experience conflict to a much greater degree than men. The gender differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

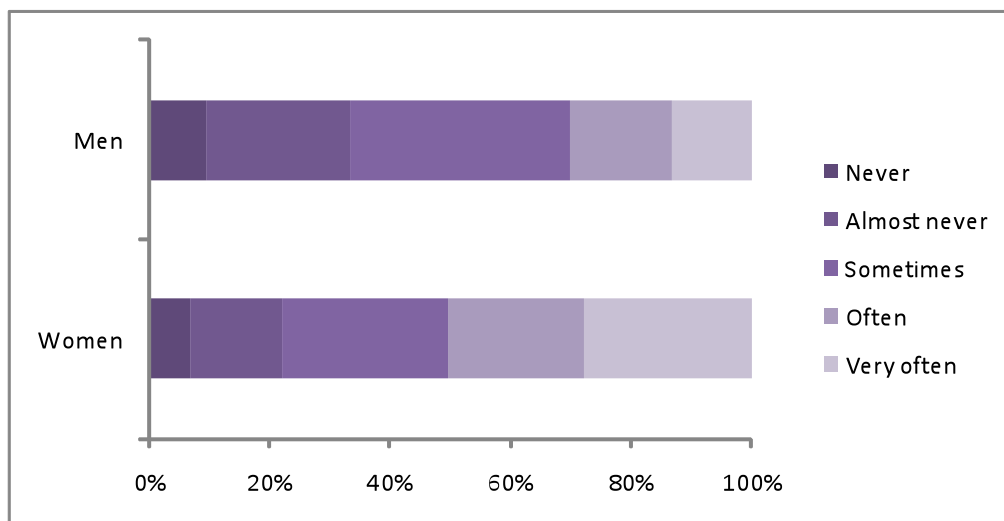


Figure 1 Experience of Conflict between Work and Family according to Sex (n=433)

While a minority of fathers (10%) and mothers (7%) experienced no conflict between work and their personal life, nearly one-quarter of mothers (23%) compared with 17 per cent of fathers

'often' experienced such conflict. The gender differences were even stronger among parents who 'very often' experienced conflict – 28 per cent of mothers and 13 per cent of fathers (Figure 1). Overall there were statistically significant differences between mothers' and fathers' experience of conflict ($p < 0.01$). An ordinal logistic regression model showed that both sex and hours worked contributed to the level of conflict experienced.

The following sections examine some of the responses to questions that related to how conflict might be reduced or fuelled in terms of the availability of flexible working and the degree to which different family/partner influences had interfered with their entrepreneurial activities.

Flexible Working Arrangements

Parents were asked whether they offered a range of flexible arrangements to their employees. The most common one available was flexitime, to staff in 179 enterprises, with more women-led owners having it available than men's businesses ($p < 0.05$). This was true to a greater extent with reduced working hours, available to staff in 45 of fathers' and 75 of mothers' SMEs ($p < 0.01$). Parental leave and paternity leave were less commonly available in 56 and 25 enterprises respectively. There were no statistically significant differences between family related leave availability in the enterprises owned and run by fathers and mothers.

Respondents were asked about the relative importance they attached to flexible working *for their employees* (where relevant) and *themselves*. For both, the differences in the responses of mothers and fathers were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Only a small percentage of entrepreneurs, male and female, ranked the need for flexible working for employees as unimportant or not very important (17% of fathers and 10% of mothers) compared with 54 per cent of mothers who ranked this flexibility as very important and a further 20 per cent as important. The level of agreement that flexibility was important, or very important, among fathers was 57 per cent in total. An examination of this using ordinal logistic modeling showed an effect from both sex and involvement in childcare: the greater the involvement in childcare, the more important flexible working became for employees ($p < 0.01$).

A similar, if more pronounced, gender cleavage exists in relation to the importance of flexibility for entrepreneurs themselves. More than one-quarter of fathers (28%), compared with only seven per cent of mothers, ranked flexibility for themselves as unimportant or not very important. In contrast, 58 per cent of mothers felt that flexibility was very important for them

while an additional 18 per cent also ranked such flexibility as important. While more than half of fathers ranked flexibility for themselves as important or very important, only one-third (35%) felt it was very important. Both the hours worked and sex were important in predicting the importance attached to flexibility for themselves. Working longer hours and being male reduced this effect ($p < 0.01$). In addition, involvement in childcare also increased the importance of flexible working for entrepreneurial parents ($p = 0.01$).

Given the different responses from female and male entrepreneurial parents to flexible working, the next section examines a range of possible factors that might have impeded them in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Interference with Careers in Business

Survey respondents were asked if a number of obligations/circumstances might have interfered with the development and growth of their businesses, namely: care of child/family member; after-school care of children; partner's career; partner's attitude; housework and other family commitments. In each case the gender differences in responses were statistically highly significant ($p < 0.01$).

Some or Much Interference from:	n	Mothers	Fathers
Care of Child or Other Family Member **	407	32%	7%
After School Care of Child(ren) **	392	35%	16%
Partner's Career **	389	18%	5%
Partner's Attitude **	393	14%	7%
Housework **	404	16%	3%

Table 1 Experience of Interference with Business according to Sex

** denotes a statistically significant difference at the 1% level

Mothers (32%) were much more likely than fathers (7%) to have experienced some/much interference in their business career stemming from childcare or care of another family member. The ability to delegate childcare to the other parent reduced this level of interference slightly, but was only significant at the 10 per cent level. More than one-third of mothers (35%) claimed that after-school care had interfered (some/much) with their business career, compared with 16 per cent of fathers. This level of interference from after-school care was also highly affected by the number of hours worked ($p < 0.05$) as well as sex ($p < 0.01$).

Partners' careers had interfered much less in the business development of mothers (18% some/much interference) and fathers (5% some/much interference). However more women claimed that their partner's attitude had interfered some or a lot (14%) compared with the men surveyed (7%). However, when controlling for other variables, it appears that this is closely related to the number of hours worked rather than sex itself: the greater number of hours worked, the stronger the interference from spousal attitude is reported ($p < 0.01$).

Finally, major gender differences are evident in relation to how much housework had interfered with mothers' and fathers' careers in business. While 16 per cent of mothers claimed that housework had interfered (some/much), this applied to only 3 per cent of fathers (Table 1). The level of interference was higher for parents who were involved in childcare ($p < 0.05$).

Personal Sacrifices

Respondents were asked about sacrifices they may have made in progressing their business that would have reduced their own free time, or time spent with friends, partner, child/ren or in postponing having children. There were no statistically significant differences in the responses from fathers and mothers in relation to any of these forms of sacrifice.

Three-quarters of fathers and mothers had sacrificed some/much of their free time (Table 2). A higher percentage of mothers (53%) than fathers (45%) had sacrificed a lot of their free time in order to further their business venture.

Some or Much Sacrifices in:	n	Mothers	Fathers
Free Time	413	75%	75%
Social Time	401	58%	54%
Time Spent with Children	401	43%	36%
Time spent with Partner	395	41%	39%
Delaying having Children	351	7%	4%

Table 2 Levels of Personal Sacrifice according to Sex

A majority of parents had sacrificed time that they would otherwise have spent socialising in order to succeed in their business venture, 58 per cent of mothers and 54 per cent of fathers.

While mothers in the sample worked shorter hours than fathers it is evident from Table 2 that women entrepreneurs felt that they had made more sacrifices in relation to time spent with their

child/ren than the men surveyed, though these gender differences were not statistically significant. More than one third of fathers (36%) had sacrificed some or a lot of time with their children, this applied to 43 per cent of mothers. Similar proportions of mothers (29%) and fathers (28%) felt that they had sacrificed little or no time that would have been spent with their children, due to their business ventures. An ordinal logistic model showed that the level of making sacrifices was highest for those who worked long hours ($p < 0.01$) or did not have any involvement in childcare ($p < 0.01$) in addition to being a mother ($p < 0.01$).

The pattern of responses for sacrifices in time spent with their spouse/partner was very similar for mothers and fathers. Forty-one per cent of fathers and 39 per cent of mothers had sacrificed some/much time with their partners. Levels of sacrifice were highest for those working long hours ($p < 0.01$), not involved in childcare ($p < 0.05$) and being a mother ($p < 0.05$). When asked if they had made sacrifices by delaying having children, only a very small minority of mothers (7%) and fathers (4%) had made major sacrifices in delaying having children and the gender differences were not statistically significant.

Conclusions

In the face of a culture of long working hours experienced by many entrepreneurial respondents, different attitudes to WLB can be observed among entrepreneurial mothers and fathers. Mothers unsurprisingly attach a greater importance to flexible work arrangements and report putting it into practice in their ventures to a greater extent than fathers.

The study also highlights the greater degree of conflict experienced by mothers, despite the perception of similar levels of sacrifice. Possible explanations could be due to the greater degree of concurrent demands on mothers leading to greater conflict for them, as discussed by Stoner et al (1990) or in the family embedded work of Aldrich and Cliff (2003). Alternatively, as the results may arise as a direct consequence of the uni-directional work/home trade-off experienced by women (Posig and Kickul, 2004).

Most importantly, the analysis shows that, in some instances, the number of hours worked is critical in understanding the level of conflict and interference experienced, although hours worked are themselves highly gendered. Remarkable by its absence is the lack of effect of both the number of dependent children and the ability to delegate childcare to another parent when used as control variables. The analysis also showed the importance of responsibility for

childcare: being involved in childcare decreased some types of sacrifice in time, presumably due to an increased presence within the home, and had little effect on any forms of interference with the business.

This paper has identified a major gap in the prevailing discourse around gender and entrepreneurship by highlighting the need to take account of divergent childcare arrangements. While societal expectations suggest that women can now progress their careers in the professions, employment and business *on similar terms to men*, this fails to acknowledge the inequitable division of labour in the domestic sphere for many women entrepreneurs once they become mothers – relatively few can expect their partners to provide primary childcare or to share that responsibility equitably.

Divergent childcare arrangements have not been adequately examined in the context of entrepreneurial activity. Research to date that sought to explain women's lower levels of commitment, productivity and business growth has assumed that 1. women choose family over business concerns and 2. that an uneven division of labour within the home is reflected in uneven business venture outcomes. The findings of this paper challenge the long term viability of the second assumption. An alternative vision of women and men as entrepreneurs would seek to factor in availability for care and responsibility for child(ren) and other family members – to be shared equally among couples/family members. The current link between care and employment is detrimental to women's equality. These findings suggest that within a more fluid future environment of small businesses and entrepreneurship, a continuation of existing and highly gendered patterns of family care must be challenged. The prevailing discourse of domesticity and motherhood as an impediment to successful business ventures for women needs to be revised to take into account new family roles, especially among fathers, and a shift away from the women=mother=role conflict discourse. With the emergence of more egalitarian gender roles, domesticity and childcare do not have to be seen as exclusively 'female' activities which conflict with work and business growth. Doing entrepreneurship differently could mean that men replicate women's patterns (to reduce role conflicts) rather than the (socially accepted) alternative.

In the light of these findings, policy makers need to re-orient their incentives/measures to encourage entrepreneurship as a means of reconciling work/family life and achieving WLB via more diverse interventions and a broad range of key players: not only government, employers

and trade unions but educators and service providers – most notably in early childcare. Irish society has seen major changes in the representation of women in the labour market alongside a virtually privatised system of childcare which is very expensive for parents. Women's increased participation in the labour market has brought about two jobs for women/mothers while leaving men to pursue serious careers and to build major enterprises. The all too prevailing policy measures have served to 'accommodate' Irish women's need for flexibility, hence the *status quo* that seems self-perpetuating. However, EU countries like Finland that have achieved high levels of female entrepreneurship have done so by diverse and interconnected policies to attain equality in all spheres and have stressed the objective of sharing parenting.

Among the policy implications, key starting points are: parenting skills in the primary and secondary curriculum for boys and girls; broadening career aspirations to reduce gender segregation via work experience/vocational courses (including entrepreneurship) crossing the gender divide; subsidised affordable high quality childcare with full/part-time options; paid parental and paternity leave to ensure that men can avail; flexible working time options (not just full or part-time) with rights to access same at family formation, and family as well as financial/information supports for entrepreneurs wishing to combine business and family.

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Appendix

Sacrifice of Time with Partner

	Coefficient Estimate	Significance
Number of children under 18	.044	.610
Number of hours worked	.031	<.001
Selves involved in childcare	-.566	.012
Ability to delegate childcare to other parent	.241	.236
Men	-.496	.021

Link function: Logit.

Sacrifice of Time with Children

	Coefficient Estimate	Significance
Number of children under 18	.064	.458
Number of hours worked	.035	<.001
Selves involved in childcare	-1.127	<.001
Ability to delegate childcare to other parent	.105	.605
Men	-.841	<.001

Link function: Logit.

Importance of Flexibility for Employees

	Coefficient Estimate	Significance
Number of children under 18	.033	.713
Number of hours worked	.000	.973
Selves involved in childcare	.746	.002
Ability to delegate childcare to other parent	-.081	.695
Men	-.920	<.001

Link function: Logit.

Importance of Flexibility for Selves

	Coefficient Estimate	Significance
Number of children under 18	.088	.314
Number of hours worked	-.019	.002
Selves involved in childcare	.597	.010
Ability to delegate childcare to other parent	-.148	.464
Men	-.677	.001

Link function: Logit.

Interference from Care

	Coefficient Estimate	Significance
Number of children under 18	-.027	.763
Number of hours worked	-.008	.201
Selves involved in childcare	.004	.984
Ability to delegate childcare to other parent	-.369	.073
Men	-1.129	<.001

Link function: Logit.

Interference from After School Care

	Coefficient Estimate	Significance
Number of children under 18	.076	.382
Number of hours worked	.013	.032
Selves involved in childcare	-.284	.215
Ability to delegate childcare to other parent	-.178	.382
Men	-1.018	<.001

Link function: Logit.

Interference from Partner's Attitude to Work

	Coefficient Estimate	Significance
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Number of children under 18	.004	.965
Number of hours worked	.021	.002
Selves involved in childcare	.312	.205
Ability to delegate childcare to other parent	.276	.214
Men	-.168	.473

Link function: Logit.

Interference from Housework

	Coefficient Estimate	Significance
Number of children under 18	.073	.432
Number of hours worked	<.001	.965
Selves involved in childcare	.514	.026
Ability to delegate childcare to other parent	-.366	.096
Men	-1.305	<.001

Link function: Logit.