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# Literature review of issues related to work-life balance, workplace culture and maternity/childcare issues

*Jennifer Redmond, Maryann Valiulis and Eileen Drew*

JUNE 2006

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## Foreword

I am very pleased to present this report. It gives a comprehensive overview of findings from national and international literature on three areas: work-life balance, workplace culture and maternity/childcare issues.

Work-life balance policies, workplace culture, childcare and maternity issues can have a special resonance for those who are facing a crisis pregnancy. As the report suggests, a supportive workplace culture, measures that promote work-life balance and the availability of affordable, accessible and high quality childcare can influence the decision-making process in a crisis pregnancy situation. In short, those who feel that they can successfully combine work and parenthood are more likely to continue with an unplanned pregnancy and parent their child.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency is aware of the need to make educational establishments and workplaces more child-friendly. The availability of local affordable childcare is vital if we are to succeed in reducing the number of crisis pregnancies in Ireland that end in abortion.

I hope that this report will support and inform policymakers and employers who are considering introducing measures to make the workplace more supportive of their workers' need to balance employment commitments with family life. These areas are becoming increasingly important for all employees, not only for those with families.

*Olive Braiden*  
*Chair*  
*Crisis Pregnancy Agency*

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*The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the sponsors*

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## Executive summary

This literature review seeks to outline, analyse and synthesise research on the three related topics of work-life balance, workplace culture, and maternity/childcare issues. These topics are important for those facing a crisis pregnancy, and the perspectives of those facing such a pregnancy are considered in all sections of this report. The importance of such a review cannot be underestimated: it is a key resource for policy makers, theorists, employers and employees, as well as working parents and childcare providers.

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency has identified making educational institutions and the workplace more child-friendly, as well as increasing the availability of local, affordable childcare, as recommended courses of action in the attempt to reduce the number of crisis pregnancies in Ireland leading to abortion (2004a: 10). Recent research has outlined a number of ways in which women are currently struggling to manage the pressures of combining work and family life. Murphy-Lawless, Oaks and Brady (2004), in their research on sexually active women's attitudes to fertility, sex and motherhood, found that the young women in their survey had serious doubts about their ability to cope with the demands of motherhood and the labour market. For those respondents who had faced a crisis pregnancy and kept their child, the strains of meeting the competing needs of their child, themselves and their workplace were reported, as well as the difficult financial circumstances they often found themselves in (66). Research by Rundle, Leigh, McGee and Layte (2004) found that 28% of the female research participants and 23% of the male participants had had experience of a crisis pregnancy. In addition, the average age of the most recent crisis pregnancy reported by their research sample was 23.4 years for women and 24.6 years for men - ages at which one is generally active in the labour market. Thus, previous research indicates that the issues of work-life balance, workplace culture and maternity/childcare issues are highly relevant to those facing an unplanned pregnancy.

This literature review demonstrates that whilst important knowledge has been produced thus far, more information is needed in all three thematic areas on the impact such issues will have on those facing a crisis pregnancy. It is unclear as yet to what extent work-life balance policies - or the lack of them - in the workplace may impact on the decision-making process, but it is clear they may influence perceptions of being able to cope with an unplanned child. Similarly, the extent to which workplace cultures promote work-life balance - particularly in relation to the needs of working parents - may influence the decision of whether or not to continue with a pregnancy. The provision and cost of childcare services in the workplace or local area may also have an impact on those facing a crisis pregnancy as they try to judge their ability to manage parental responsibilities. Research is also needed on those who do not currently have children and are not facing a crisis pregnancy, in order to establish general trends in current non-parent workplace behaviours and attitudes. In all, it can be seen that whilst there has been significant research already conducted, this needs to be built upon and extended to fill the gaps that exist in the literature.

Work-life balance has become adopted in Ireland as part of the economic partnership agreement set up to achieve economic goals and best practice in employment policies. So far there has been uneven implementation of work-life balance initiatives, with the

public sector taking the lead. However, many private enterprises have also taken up work-life balance as a human resource (HR) issue, as they see business benefits to implementing flexible working. Work-life balance is advocated as an inclusive policy, aimed at *all* workers, in order to achieve a more harmonious balance between their work responsibilities and their private responsibilities and interests. The main consideration thus far has been to aid working parents in their childcare needs and responsibilities, but more recently other employee needs have been considered, such as eldercare responsibilities, education and training opportunities, and the need for personal time in order to combat negative stress experienced in the workplace. Work-life balance policies can be realised through flexible working practices and the fostering of open and inclusive workplace environments.

Such open and inclusive workplace environments are necessary for implementing changes for a number of reasons. Legislative measures to improve work-life balance will only work if a supportive workplace environment promotes them. The workplace culture will also determine the extent to which they are implemented and who may access flexible working arrangements. Workplace cultures are also important to consider in relation to those facing a crisis pregnancy: a positive workplace culture may be seen as a source of support for continuing with the pregnancy, whereas a pressurised, inflexible environment, which is unsupportive of working parents, may act as a factor that militates against becoming a parent. The literature demonstrates that structural change is needed to alter working routines and norms, such as the long-hours culture and presenteeism. Management styles and practices are also crucial to work-life balance policies, and the literature reveals the need for managers to receive support and training in order to effectively implement and assess flexible working arrangements.

Maternity and childcare issues are considered in the context of current legislation and workplace policies. It can be seen from the literature that while there has been much effort to research policy on matters such as maternity needs, childcare needs, and early education for infants, there is a disjunction between policy and practice in the workplace. Many working parents are experiencing increasing levels of stress due to two main factors: the lack of work-life balance arrangements in the workplace and the lack of affordable childcare in all forms of childcare centres. Almost all parents are experiencing problems in terms of accessing adequate, affordable, local childcare that meets their needs and those of their children. These problems are exacerbated in the case of lone parents, who are more constrained by time and money than dual-earner couples. These issues will be of particular concern to those facing a crisis pregnancy, and some may view the problems of combining childcare, work and domestic responsibilities as constituting too great a challenge.

The review of qualitative and quantitative data on work-life balance, workplace culture, and maternity/childcare issues demonstrates that work-life balance policies need to be implemented as much as possible in all industries, and on a wider basis in organisations that are currently using them. They also need to be assessed efficiently and regularly in order to improve their practice in the workplace. Indicators of success and failure need to be established for industries on a national basis. Workplace cultures need to be explored to a greater extent to determine what changes are needed to successfully adopt work-life balance policies and to establish more clearly the 'hidden' practices that

hinder implementation. Improvements in maternity leave need to be matched by statutory paternity leave in order to combat current gender inequalities in leave legislation related to childbirth. The literature also highlights the demand for improvements in childcare services, with a preference for company based crèches and centres. If these objectives were achieved, it would enhance the range of options available to those facing an unplanned or crisis pregnancy. As Murphy-Lawless *et al.* assert: "As a society, we now face the complex task of supporting women, no matter what they decide, while at the same time working to provide a far more equitable distribution of life chances, so that the scope for decision making is evened out across the strata for all women" (2004: 69).

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Aims of the literature review

The issues of work-life balance, workplace culture and maternity and childcare are clearly interrelated and affect a majority of workers at some point in their lives. These issues are particularly relevant for those facing a crisis pregnancy as they may, according to individual circumstances, inform or influence the decision-making process around such a pregnancy in terms of the options, supports or constraints facing the individual. They are also topical policy issues and have attracted public interest and debate from a wide variety of perspectives: government departments, employers, trade unions, employees, parents, childcare specialists and providers, among others. All these perspectives are included in the literature review. Outlining and critiquing literature on each of these themes provides an evidence base for further policy initiatives in these areas. It also highlights gaps in the literature, thus leading to the formulation of further research questions that must be addressed, particularly in a national context. In addition, it is the aim of this review to highlight issues within each of the themes that may have an impact on those facing a crisis pregnancy.

The following are the aims of the literature review:

- To review and critique published literature, both in Ireland and internationally, which explores the issues of work-life balance, workplace culture, and maternity/childcare issues
- To summarise and synthesise the range of recommendations (for action and/or policy change) that are made in research reports and to relate these to the 'evidence' behind them
- To highlight the main issues addressed in international literature in relation to this topic and to place this data within an Irish context for comparative purposes
- To present the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (CPA) with an analysis of current research gaps - with respect to both quantitative and qualitative research findings. This involves a comparison of Irish data and research approaches with international literature
- From the analysis of the research gaps, to outline and provide a thorough rationale for a series of research questions that need to be addressed in an Irish context and propose a methodology that is best placed to resolve these questions
- To fully address methodological issues arising from the literature review, including limitations with respect to the reliability, validity and generalisability of research findings and recommendations for how research findings can be further tested, supported and validated.

### 1.2 Structure of the literature review

The literature review is organised into chapters dealing separately with work-life balance, workplace culture, and maternity/childcare issues, within which are sections on the issue of crisis pregnancy. The sections on crisis pregnancy both review the existing literature and consider the potential or hypothetical impact these issues may have on an individual facing a crisis pregnancy. Chapter 2 discusses the issue of work-life balance,

Chapter 3 discusses the issue of workplace culture, while Chapter 4 discusses maternity/childcare issues. Each of the three thematic chapters has summary sections and ends with conclusions. Chapter 5 outlines the conclusions arising generally from the literature review, and the research questions arising from the literature that must still be addressed. It also proposes potential methodologies for addressing these questions.

### 1.3 Issues for crisis pregnancy

Crisis pregnancy is defined as a “pregnancy which is neither planned nor desired by the woman concerned, and which represents a personal crisis for her” (Crisis Pregnancy Agency 2004a: 5). There are three possible outcomes of such a pregnancy: the decision to keep the child, the decision to put the child up for adoption once born, or the decision to have an abortion. Another aspect of crisis pregnancy is when the pregnancy is not interpreted as a crisis at first, but becomes so due to a change in circumstances, a facet of the problem as yet neglected in the literature (O’Keeffe 2004).

The government set up the Crisis Pregnancy Agency in 2001 in order to respond to issues of crisis pregnancy in Ireland. The Crisis Pregnancy Agency has developed a strategy to provide for:

- a reduction in the number of crisis pregnancies by the provision of education, advice and contraceptive services
- a reduction in the number of women with crisis pregnancies who opt for abortion by offering services and supports which make other options more attractive
- the provision of counselling and welfare services after crisis pregnancy (Statutory Instrument No. 446, 2001).

Within each of the thematic sections a sub-section on how the issues arising from the literature review will particularly affect those facing a crisis pregnancy are highlighted. Recent research conducted in Ireland has highlighted attitudes towards, and experiences of, crisis pregnancy, and has shown that crisis pregnancy will have an impact on those both in work and in education or training (see Murphy-Lawless *et al.* 2004, O’Keeffe 2004, Rundle, Leigh, McGee and Layte 2004, Mahon, Conlon and Dillon 1998). Rundle *et al.* (2004) conducted interviews with 3,317 individuals - 1,356 males and 1,961 females between the ages of 18 and 45 years. They found that 28% of the female research participants and 23% of the male participants had had experience of a crisis pregnancy. In addition, the average age of the most recent crisis pregnancy reported by their research sample was 23.4 years for women and 24.6 years for men, ages at which one is generally active in the labour market. Thus previous research indicates that the issues of work-life balance, workplace culture and maternity/childcare issues are highly relevant to those facing an unplanned pregnancy.

The variety of factors surrounding - and indeed determining - a crisis pregnancy must be acknowledged in any review of literature of this kind. The factors cited as being influential in the interpretation of a pregnancy as a crisis range from personal and emotional perceptions to relationship and financial status. These will vary in importance according to individual circumstances; however, it is evident from previous research that employment and career paths are critically important to those facing a crisis pregnancy. In the context of this literature review, it is evident that parenting as an option is

currently unattractive for many women, as they feel it is not easily reconcilable - and in some cases, incompatible - with their career. Work-life balance needs are thus paramount if a reduction is to be achieved in the number of women experiencing a crisis pregnancy who opt for abortion.

The distinction is also made between those facing a crisis pregnancy on their own and those facing a crisis pregnancy with a partner, as this will not only affect the response and decision-making process to the crisis pregnancy, but also the impact of the three thematic areas on the individual(s). It is important to highlight that much of the literature deals with the outcome of crisis pregnancy as being female lone parenthood, although this is only one possible outcome of crisis pregnancy. This literature focuses on the difficulties of being a female lone parent, including poverty and lack of access to further education and/or the workplace. A key feature of this literature is its focus on the difficulties experienced by lone parents in achieving work-life balance as a result of employment demands and the difficulties in accessing appropriate childcare arrangements. However, the focus on female lone parenthood does not consider any other possible outcomes of crisis pregnancy, such as termination, adoption, or male lone parenthood. It also does not make clear those pregnancies to lone parents that are not interpreted as a crisis, whether or not they are planned.

There has been a significant body of research on those facing an unplanned pregnancy in relation to their reasons for choosing abortion, adoption and parenting. A key issue is the workplace - and more specifically, work-life balance issues, which have been identified as a key factor for those facing unplanned reproductive choices (Mahon *et al.* 1998, Murphy-Lawless *et al.* 2004, Crisis Pregnancy Agency 2004a, O'Keeffe 2004). Research on the specific issue of how those faced with a crisis pregnancy see their workplace environment and/or structure as being a relevant factor (or not) in their decisions about such a pregnancy needs to be expanded. This would generate more options for those facing a dilemma due to employment factors as a result of a crisis pregnancy. Due to the status of the current research on crisis pregnancy, therefore, much of the literature is used to hypothesise about possible problems or outcomes of working and childcare arrangements and work-life balance needs on those facing a crisis pregnancy.

#### 1.4 Work-life balance: definitions and key terms

Work-life balance is the term used in the literature to refer to policies that strive to achieve a greater complementarity and balance between work and home responsibilities. These policies apply to all workers, not just working parents, and their presence or absence in an organisation may have an effect on those facing a crisis pregnancy, particularly in judging their own ability to combine both work and family life.

Some of the terms used in the literature on work-life balance are not commonly used or may be unfamiliar, thus explanations and definitions are given below:

**WLB:** Work-life Balance, also referred to as family friendly work arrangements (FFWA), and, in international literature, as alternative work arrangements (AWA).

**V-Time:** this is voluntary overtime to meet production needs; extra hours are 'banked' and taken as time off or as extra pay. It differs from flexitime where starting and finishing times are staggered, and can mean reduced or increased weekly working hours over a period of time.

**Zero hours contract:** this is a flexible contract that does not specify the amount of time a worker will spend per year on their employment, leaving it open to meet demand.

**E-working:** the term used to describe flexible working that can be done from any location using technologies such as laptops, wireless internet connection and mobile phones.

**Teleworking:** this is where the location is flexible by using technologies to complete work - this allows work to be done from home; also known as e-working.

**Term-time working:** this is when a parent is allowed to work only during school term times, with all school holidays off. Payment can be calculated either by usual payment, with no payment during holidays, or salaries can be spread out across the year.

Other forms of flexible working conditions include:

- part-time working
- job sharing
- flexitime
- shift working
- annualised hours
- compressed hours
- home working
- career breaks
- study leave.

[For a more comprehensive glossary of terms see Appendix 1.]

The literature on work-life balance includes surveys of provision of work-life balance policies, as well as attitudes to them, from the perspective of both employers and employees.

### 1.5 Workplace culture: definitions and key terms

Workplace culture refers to the 'way employees have been socialized by their work organisation' (Hofstede 1991: 10). As such, the term workplace culture incorporates the organisational customs and traditions that inform the organisation's ethos, including standard hours worked, hierarchy, self-management procedures, as well as the more informal aspects of the workplace environment. In the context of this literature review, studies examining workplace culture generally focus on attitudinal responses to organisational structures and policies (from the perspective of both employers and employees), management ethos, and peer responses to working norms. Issues for those facing a crisis pregnancy include, for example, attitudes within an organisation towards prospective or working parents, whether positive or negative, which may influence the decision-making process of those facing a crisis pregnancy.

### 1.6 Maternity and childcare issues: definitions and key terms

Issues of maternity and childcare encompass legislative and organisational practices that accommodate (or indeed fail to accommodate) the maternity and childcare needs of employees. Issues relating to maternity and childcare will be of immediate significance to those facing a crisis pregnancy, particularly if they are engaged in education or employment.

Childcare is defined by the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare as the term used to describe “daycare facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out of school hours ... such as pre-schools, naionraí<sup>1</sup>, daycare services, crèches, playgroups, childminding and after-school groups” excluding primary, secondary and special-education schools (1999: xxiii).

A number of advisory groups have been set up by Irish governments over the last number of years to respond to a perceived 'crisis' in childcare provision. The term 'crisis' is often used in response to the current lack of childcare provision in Ireland, and the consequences such as stress on parents, inadequate facilities due to overcrowding, and an over-reliance on private childminders. The literature reviewed includes statutory and policy responses to childcare needs, as well as attitudinal data on perceptions of need for services.

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<sup>1</sup> Irish speaking childcare centres

## 2.0 Literature and findings on work-life balance

### 2.1 Introduction

The term work-life balance is commonly used as a more comprehensive expression to describe policies that have been previously termed 'family-friendly', but are now extended beyond the scope of the family. Work-life balance refers to the flexible working arrangements that allow both parents and non-parents to avail of working arrangements that provide a balance between work responsibilities and personal responsibilities. The term 'work-life balance' is preferred due to the fact that it encompasses the experiences and needs of parents and non-parents alike, and is a more progressive theoretical framework in which to think about new ways of living and working that are satisfactory to all. In practice, it involves "adjusting work patterns so that everyone, regardless of age, race or gender can find a rhythm that enables them more easily to combine work and their other responsibilities and aspirations" (Pillinger 2001: 1). Drew, Humphreys and Murphy point out "that personal fulfilment is important inside work and that satisfaction *outside work may enhance employees'* contribution to work" (2003:13). Thus, work-life balance is now the term of choice.

Work-life balance policies are often referred to in practice as 'flexible working', and include the following different ways of working:

- part-time working
- job sharing
- flexitime
- term-time working
- shift working
- annualised hours
- compressed hours
- teleworking / e-working
- home working
- career breaks
- study leave
- zero hours contracts
- V-Time.

The general aim of such working time policies is to strike a balance between employment and domestic commitments that is equitable and beneficial to both employer and employee. As will be outlined below, these policies have achieved their goals to varying degrees. The most successful of these policies are those that have been implemented after a consultation process between employer and employee. In the Irish context it can be seen that the public sector has espoused the greatest commitment to and implementation of work-life balance policies, a finding which is common to other countries also.

### 2.2 Impacts on those facing a crisis pregnancy

It is evident from a review of the literature that work-life balance policies are needed within the workplace for all women and parents, in order to ease the burden of the pressures experienced in combining work and family life. It is also evident that the

workplace will have an impact on the reproductive decisions made by all individuals, including those facing a crisis pregnancy. The literature review examined the available evidence on whether the provision of flexible working arrangements in an organisation can affect the decision to continue or not with a crisis pregnancy. If the option to work flexibly around childcare responsibilities is a reality, it may have an effect on the decision around a crisis pregnancy; i.e. if facilitation of family responsibilities by the employer is a reality, it may lead the woman to continue with her pregnancy. However, there have been no studies as yet *specifically* examining the effect of flexible working on decision making in a crisis pregnancy situation from the perspective of those facing such a pregnancy.

The option of abortion in a crisis pregnancy situation is one that is chosen by many thousands of Irish women each year (McGrath, O'Keeffe and Smith 2005: 23)<sup>2</sup>. The absence or presence of flexible working arrangements may also have a role in this scenario, and evidence from research on crisis pregnancy highlights this issue (Mahon *et al.* 1998, Crisis Pregnancy Agency 2003, 2004a, 2004b, O'Keeffe 2004, Murphy-Lawless *et al.* 2004, Conlon 2005). For example, Mahon *et al.* found that work-life balance considerations were a significant factor for women when deciding what to do about their unplanned pregnancy:

*In the eyes of these women, motherhood makes particular demands and in many cases is viewed as being incompatible with their present working lives and careers, though feasible at a later stage in their lives, provided they continue their education, training or careers. This was particularly so in the case of mothers without self-sufficient or financially viable partners (1998: 273).*

It is interesting to note that there was a perception that working and parenting were 'incompatible' for some of those women facing a crisis pregnancy, and thus they decided on abortion. This suggests that work-life balance policies can have a significant impact on the psychological preparedness of women facing a crisis pregnancy. However, work-life balance issues were a consideration for all women, as they had to consider how a child could fit into their lives. This indicates that work-life balance impacts heavily in the decision-making process of women facing a crisis pregnancy, as well as determining their interpretation of a pregnancy as crisis. The participants in Conlon's study expressed the need for advice on how to combine work and motherhood, indicating that this type of advice is necessary and helpful to women facing the prospect of rearing a child (2005:93).

The range of choices that those who are facing a crisis pregnancy will have about how to balance their life and responsibilities if they have a child will have an impact on their decision. To a certain extent, these choices will be determined by their current situation, rather than any potential situation that they may face if they have the child. Walby points out that for women, choices about how to balance work and caring responsibilities are *always* restricted, no matter what their circumstances, due to the fact that they have not generally been in powerful positions to determine the structures that govern choice:

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<sup>2</sup> In 2003, 6,320 women giving addresses in the Republic of Ireland had abortions in UK clinics (McGrath *et al.* 2005: 23).

*Women make choices, but not under conditions of their own making. Women choose the best option that they can see, rationally, though usually with imperfect knowledge, but only within the range of options open to them. The decision as to whether to spend more time on the home or more time on paid work is a rational choice. But those choices cannot be understood outside of an understanding of the institutions and structures which construct those options (1997:25).*

Due to the lack of policy thus far surrounding supports or initiatives in the workplace to help those facing a crisis pregnancy, it is obvious that for those women facing such a prospect, lack of choices in meeting both domestic and employment needs will have a huge impact on their decisions.

Much of the literature focuses on lone parenthood; indeed, there is more literature on this aspect of crisis pregnancy than any other, even though this is only one possible outcome of an unplanned pregnancy. However, literature on lone parenthood is relevant in a consideration of crisis pregnancy if it is a prospect for either of the potential parents in facing such a pregnancy. Lone parents constitute 16% of families in Ireland (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 64), thus they are a significant minority whose needs must be considered in the formulation of workplace and childcare policies (see section 2.5.3 for discussion of lone parents in the labour force).

Work and careers are seen as important aspects of the lives of individuals beyond basic financial needs. The workplace often provides fulfilment at a personal level, as well as being a social arena to develop relationships and receive support. The qualitative study conducted by Murphy-Lawless *et al.* (2004), considered the perspective of women who were not currently mothers, thus they can be seen as potential future mothers and/or individuals who may face a crisis pregnancy. Individual interviews were conducted with twenty women in addition to twelve focus groups (totalling 48 female participants from all groups). In terms of a demographic profile, the research participants were between 19 and 34 years of age, from various geographical locations, and employed in a range of occupations (almost all respondents were working). The study aimed to explore young women's attitudes towards fertility, sex and motherhood, and it was evident from their comments that employment was both an expected and important feature of their lives. Respondents stated that having "secure economic circumstances and social support in order to rear a child" was highly important to them (2004:50). In order for the 'secure economic circumstances' to be achieved, respondents would have to have financial stability, usually through employment. Thus, these women viewed employment as a *prerequisite* to motherhood in many cases. Respondents also outlined the range of difficulties in negotiating reproductive choices with employment, such as how to have enough time and energy to do both, how to afford childcare as well as other expenses, and how to fit motherhood in with employment demands and goals. These are challenges faced by all parents and potential parents, and will be factors of pressing importance for individuals unexpectedly faced with a crisis pregnancy.

For those facing an unplanned or crisis pregnancy, the possibility of having to give up work may arise if lone parenthood is an outcome of the pregnancy, or if their circumstances do not permit the combination of work and family life. This potentially eliminates a system of support, through colleagues or workplace structural supports, and may limit opportunities for social engagement. A single mother in the 1978 study by

Kenny expresses this feeling of the personal need for work in the following quote:

*The money angle [to having a job] is important, because you usually are short of money. But there are other things that are important about it too. There's the emotional side. There's the need to have other adults to talk to. There's the need for an outside life. (1978: 139)*

Lone parents are also less able to work unsocial or extended hours, which puts them at a further disadvantage in the labour market, and may lead them to either leave employment or accept low-paid or insecure jobs to meet their childcare demands. In consideration of these potential outcomes, it seems obvious that if the incidence of crisis pregnancy could potentially threaten the ability of either parent to work, their desire to sustain their employment may override their desire to continue with the pregnancy. As one respondent in the Mahon *et al.* study who proceeded to abortion stated: "I have my life ahead of me and my job. I did not want to give that up at the moment" (1998:297).

In its 'Strategy to Address the Issue of Crisis Pregnancy', the CPA has outlined a number of solutions to problematic issues for those facing an unplanned pregnancy that can be found in the promotion of work-life balance. These include supportive workplace practices such as flexible working arrangements and paid leave for child related issues (CPA 2003: 29). It can be seen, therefore, that work-life balance policies and practices have an important role to play in reducing the number of crisis pregnancies that lead to abortion, and conversely, increasing the number of individuals who can maintain their career plans and have a family.

## 2.3 Legislative context - international and national

### 2.3.1 International legislative context

The European Union has provided the impetus to countries to address the issue of greater harmony for workers in their home and work obligations by focusing on policies around forms of parental leave. In the 1990s it set minimum standards for maternity and parental leave through the Council Directives 92/85/EEC (1992) and 96/34/EC (1996)<sup>3</sup>. As Pillinger comments, work-life balance is now seen to be crucial to the entire spectrum of working life: "Work-life balance is increasingly being viewed by the EU as central to the quality of working life, to employment rates, to competitiveness and growth, to the broader European social model and equality" (2001:1).

The existence of a supra-national body such as the EU creates a minimum standard of leave for all parents in EU countries. However, some countries, through individual national policies and legislation, have enhanced these minimum standards in an effort to create greater work-life balance for workers. France is the most notable case of using radical legislation to address the issue of work-life balance through reductions in working time. In 1999 it passed a law mandating a 35-hour working week, which is calculated on an average over the year, so that workers can work over this, or much less, at alternating times throughout the year. It was initially confined to larger companies, and plans to introduce it to medium- and small-sized enterprises are currently being negotiated. Initial resistance to the law from employers was followed by

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<sup>3</sup> These relate to measures to improve the health and safety of pregnant workers and new mothers, and to parental leave respectively.

negotiation and accommodation. However, some businesses have used the new flexibility laws to benefit themselves more than their workers, for example, by extending service hours. This has resulted in certain counterproductive outcomes; for example, the new later evening work and weekend working have served to exclude some mothers from the market (Fine-Davis, Fagnani, Gioviannini, Hojgaard and Clarke 2004: 19). Thus the law has had mixed results. In a survey of employees carried out in France in 2001, six out of ten respondents reported a positive impact on their work-life balance (*ibid.*: 20). However, in another survey carried out to assess the impact of the law, 40% of employees complained that work had become more intense - i.e. that they were expected to achieve the same amount of work in lesser time - 33% reported positive effects and 57% stated that nothing has changed for them (*ibid.*: 20). It seems that the law only positively affected some workers, but not all, and that much is dependent on how the law is implemented within the individual organisation, as well as the workplace culture. Recent proposed changes in France that would allow workers to take more paid overtime and to trade in rest days for extra payments<sup>4</sup>, have provoked both positive and negative reactions, and it is yet to be seen whether the law will be relaxed in such a way. Findings from France are indicative that legislative reforms must be carefully thought out in terms of economic and social policy outcomes, as the practical results of regulating work in line with flexible principles may not achieve the aims of the legislative reforms.

Other countries have different measures in place to facilitate work-life balance for working parents:

- Hungary, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Spain enable women to reduce their working hours in the first 9-12 months after the birth of their child, usually related to breast feeding (Deven and Moss 2005: 14)
- Austria, Norway, Spain and Sweden give parents the right to work part-time hours until their child reaches a certain age (between 6 and 8) (*ibid.*)

The U.K., similar to Italy, has implemented specific legislation on flexibility and work-life balance through the Employment Act 2002, which came into force in April 2003. One of the main elements of the legislation is the right of employees to request flexible working arrangements. The types of flexible working currently covered include:

- part-time
- job sharing
- home working
- teleworking
- shift work
- staggered hours
- annualised hours
- term-time working
- compressed hours.

The criteria for an application by an employee are that they must:

- be an employee with a child under 6, or a disabled child under 18, for whom they have parental responsibility

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<sup>4</sup> The Independent, online edition, 2nd February 2005  
[www.news.independent.co.uk/europe/story/jsp?story=606835](http://www.news.independent.co.uk/europe/story/jsp?story=606835)

- have been in continuous employment for 26 weeks
- not have made any previous applications for flexible working in the preceding 12 months.

Exemptions from these provisions are made for members of the armed forces and for those working through employment agencies. The employee has the right to appeal an employer's decision, and the right to an internal grievance procedure if they are not satisfied, which can be extended to a tribunal procedure if felt necessary within three months of the appeal decision. The employee also has the right to request flexible working again after 12 months, provided that they meet the criteria. The employer has the right to refuse, if they can prove refusal is based on one of the following grounds:

- the burden of additional costs
- detrimental effects on ability to meet customer demands
- inability to reorganise work amongst existing staff
- inability to recruit additional staff
- detrimental impact on quality
- detrimental impact on performance
- insufficiency of work during the periods the employee proposes
- planned structural changes
- such other grounds as the Secretary of State may specify by regulations.

While this legislation specifically targets the needs of working parents, it can be viewed as a positive step for achieving work-life balance for all by establishing the right to flexible working as a legal right. Its provisions for both employees and employers in negotiating new working arrangements establishes a clear set of guidelines to be followed, a factor that is helpful for both parties. Although there is significant scope on the employers' behalf for refusing requests, employees are at least guaranteed recourse through a tribunal, and the right to annually request flexible working - a factor which can be seen positively as an option to adjust working arrangements to fit with different needs at different stages in one's career. This legislation is too new to allow for assessment of its effects on sub-groups of the economy; however, it has the *potential* to be an innovative legislative response to the demand for work-life balance.

### 2.3.2 *National legislative context*

The European Union has been a major driving force in the development of leave arrangements for parents in Ireland. For example, the Irish parental leave system was introduced in 1998 in response to the 1995 EU Directive on parental leave requiring the provision of three months' parental leave, as distinct from maternity leave, for both male and female workers (OECD 2003: 131). This leave is unpaid and requires negotiation with the employer, but it has developed an EU-wide standard that ensures comparative benefits across member states. Further directives and/or legislation will undoubtedly ensue as a result of EU-level commitment to work-life balance, although as yet there is no indication that radical legislative reform, such as exists in France or the U.K., will be adopted here.

Work-life balance policies in Ireland have been framed within the legislative context of equality of opportunity. This is because flexibility in working practices allows for a greater range of people to enter the labour market; for example, mothers, lone parents,

people with disabilities, non-nationals and older workers. Ireland has continued to develop legislation to deal with equality issues on the nine grounds on which all are guaranteed equality<sup>5</sup>, which to a certain extent encompass issues of work-life balance in relation to the treatment of employees at their workplace and, most particularly, in relation to maternity and parental rights.

The following acts comprise the statutory entitlements of employees to certain rights that can be seen to be motivated by work-life balance policies:

- Maternity Protection Act 1994
- Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1994, 2001
- Adoptive Leave Act 1995
- Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2006
- Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001
- Organisation of Working Time Regulations 2001
- Carer's Leave Act 2001
- Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003
- Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004.

However, as can be seen from this, there is currently no statutory entitlement to flexible working arrangements, or even an entitlement to request them, as exists in the U.K.

Table 2.1 is a summary of the statutory provisions for maternity and parental leave in Ireland.

While legislative measures have improved both the working and family lives of those in the labour market, it is necessary to note the limits of legislation in achieving certain social changes that have their roots in attitudes and behaviours. As the Forum on the Workplace of the Future points out, "there is a need to move beyond the current model of prohibition of discrimination to a more proactive stance, which will focus on creating diverse, equitable workplace environments in which all workers are enabled to contribute fully" (2005: 85).

## 2.4 Policy responses to work-life balance

### 2.4.1 *European Union policy*

European Union policy has stressed the need to implement work-life balance policies in order to improve all aspects of equal opportunities policies. The Lisbon European Council (March 2001) stated that strengthening equal opportunities, including making it easier to combine work and family life, would reduce occupational segregation. A major result of this would be increased employment opportunities for women in Europe, with projected employment rates rising from 51% in 2001 to 60% in 2010 (Pillinger 2001: 2).

Further EU policy, including the Working Time Directive and the Green Paper on Work Organisation, stresses that flexible working practices are viewed as an "essential component of the need to combine the security that employees need with the flexibility that employers need" (Pillinger 2001: 2). Thus, from the EU perspective, flexible working

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<sup>5</sup> These grounds are: gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, religious belief and membership of the Traveller Community. For more information see the Equality Authority's website [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie).

Table 2.1 Statutory and other leave provisions in Ireland for parents

Type of leave	Paid/unpaid	Paid for by	Time	Age of child by which leave must be taken	Other leave
Maternity and related leave	Paid - 75% of weekly pay - minimum payment of €165.60 and a maximum payment of €249 per week	Maternity Benefit paid for by Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. No obligation for employers to top up benefit	22 consecutive weeks (4 weeks to be taken before the birth)*	N/A	Option to take further 12 weeks' unpaid leave which can be taken immediately after maternity leave.* Paid time off for ante- and post-natal medical visits Time off work or reduction of working hours for breastfeeding Protection against dismissal and right to return to work after leave
Paternity and related leave	Unpaid and no statutory right to payment for leave-granted at employer's discretion	Employer if applicable. If leave is due to death of the mother, payment is subject to previous social insurance payments	There is no statutory paid leave for fathers, unless the mother dies within 22 weeks of the birth of the child, then he is entitled to the remainder of her maternity leave. If she dies in childbirth, he is allowed 14 weeks' leave	N/A for ordinary leave. Must be taken within 7 days of mother's death in other cases	Leave is at employer's discretion if it is not leave due to death of spouse
Parental leave	Unpaid	N/A	14 weeks per parent. This can be taken consecutively or, with the agreement of employer, broken up over a period of time	0-8 years old or up to 16 years old in the case of children with disabilities	N/A
Force majeure (for family illness or emergency)	Full pay	Employer	Less than 3 working days in any 12 consecutive months and 5 days in any 36 consecutive months	Any age	N/A

\*This leave came into effect on 1st March 2006. There will be a further increase of 4 weeks to both paid and unpaid maternity leave from 1st March 2007, bringing the total duration of paid maternity leave to 26 weeks and the total unpaid leave to 16 weeks from that point.

Source: Adapted from Table 6.5 in Fine-Davis, Fagnani, Giovannianni, Hojgaard and Clarke (2004: 82-85). *Fathers and Mothers: Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance*. Kluwer Academic Publishers: Dordrecht.

arrangements are not only beneficial, but are necessary to both employers and employees in sustaining and developing European markets, as well as improving the quality of people's lives.

Fine-Davis *et al.* (2004) conducted a study that quantitatively and qualitatively assessed attitudes to work-life balance and different workplace policies, with particular reference to differences in the perspectives of men and women who were working parents. Research was conducted in Ireland, France, Denmark and Italy. It is noted that the new 'mother-friendly policies' are "usually defined as a basic package of maternity/parental leave plus access to day care" (Gospa Esping Andersen in Fine-Davis *et al.* 2004: v). These policies are both recognised and implemented through varying means in different countries, and the study points to the fact that more emphasis needs to be placed on an equalization of caring roles of both mothers and fathers. If this equalization of caring roles were to be created, it would achieve more radical results. Evidence of this is demonstrated in Denmark, where fathers are entitled to up to two weeks of paid paternity leave to be taken during their partner's maternity leave. This leave is not transferable to the partner, and thus is lost if the father does not take it. Fathers can also share subsequent parental leave. Uptake of this paternity leave has risen from 55% in 1991 to 67% in 1999 (Fine-Davis *et al.* 2004: 47). This suggests that direct targeting of men through statutory, paid paternity leave does improve take-up, and while this is not a panacea for the gendered division of childcare and domestic duties, it is a positive beginning.

#### 2.4.2 National policy

Work-life balance policies have attracted substantial attention from policy makers in Ireland in recent years. Work-life balance policies are seen as a necessary part of current and future employment structures for a number of reasons:

- to aid better reconciliation between work and home life
- to address current inequalities in employment, particularly gender inequalities
- to improve employee productivity, health and well being,
- more recently, to sustain Ireland's place in the world economy as a progressive and innovative marketplace.

Thus, flexible working arrangements are currently portrayed as having crucial benefits at both macro and micro levels. The Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D., evoked this latter argument at the launch of the *Working to our Advantage* report by the Forum on the Workplace of the Future: "At its simplest, there is a clear competitive advantage to be won from better deployment and development of our workforce. And there are huge societal benefits to be gained from an improved quality of life for individual workers."<sup>6</sup> Others echo this point as they argue that the current barriers to flexible working hinder best practice in enterprise (Fitzpatrick 2005, Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005, NCPP 2003a).

Work-life balance policies are currently being promoted through the national economic partnership agreements, as they are seen to promote a number of aims: increased profit, expansion of the economy and well being for workers. Work-life balance policies have also been viewed as having social and community benefits accruing from

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<sup>6</sup> Address by the Taoiseach, 9th March 2005. Text of speech available from [www.ncpp.ie](http://www.ncpp.ie)

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individuals having more time for their home and community. For example, if a worker decides to use his/her flexible time to pursue a role in their local community, these policies thus benefit social cohesion and social action.

The National Framework Committee for Work-life Balance was set up to review, develop and promote policy in relation to work-life balance<sup>7</sup>. The Committee was established under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and continues under the current National Agreement, Sustaining Progress. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment acts as chair and its membership is made up of representatives from:

- Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
- The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
- The Department of the Taoiseach
- The Department of Finance
- The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- The Department of Social and Family Affairs
- The Equality Authority.

The Work-Life Balance Network comes specifically under the Workplace Relations and Environment strand of the Sustaining Progress: Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005. Under this strand, the social partners agreed to:

- review maternity, adoptive and parental leave
- continue the work of the National Framework Committee for Work-life Balance
- build on initiatives for further provision and resources for childcare
- establish a fully inclusive social insurance model which would facilitate combining work and family life.

There is also a separate commitment to improving the flexibility of the public service, which also promotes work-life balance through the extension of flexible working arrangements.

The Forum on the Workplace of the Future is also an arena that has targeted flexible working and work-life balance policies as an area that Ireland must take seriously if it is to maintain its robust and competitive market place in the world economy. The National Centre for Partnership and Performance established the Forum at the request of the Irish government in 2003 in order to “meet the challenge of building Ireland’s knowledge and innovation driven economy” (2003a: 4). The Forum comprises a taskforce and four expert panels whose remit focuses on facilitating the needs of both the public and private sector in adapting to change in the workforce and the economy. Work-life balance is seen as a key characteristic of Ireland’s changing workforce, and has been identified as a necessary policy in order to sustain and advance Ireland’s economic growth.

Thus work-life balance can be seen to be at the heart of government social and economic policy, and it is likely that it will continue to be developed within the future partnership agreements.

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on the site, including details of the annual Work-Life Balance day, research, legislation and case studies, go to <http://www.familyfriendly.ie/>. See also the References section of this report for details of their publications.

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An underdeveloped aspect of work-life balance policies so far has been the issue of the needs of working fathers. As seen in the earlier sections on legislation (see sections 2.3.1 and 2.4.1 above), direct targeting of men through specific statutory entitlements for fathers is successful. The need for Irish legislation and/or policies to aid the work-life balance needs of fathers is argued by Ferguson and Hogan (2004) in *Strengthening Families through Fathers: Developing policy and practice in relation to vulnerable fathers and their families*. This study was funded by the Families Research Programme of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and sought to address how men can be more included in family services, particularly 'vulnerable fathers', defined as "a man who is known to be struggling to be a good enough parent due to having involvement with social services and family support agencies" (2004: 7). The report is a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with 24 'vulnerable fathers', 12 mothers, 12 children, and 20 professionals in family services. In relation to work-life balance, the authors highlight the fact that:

*The choices working fathers have around spending time with their children are severely limited. The poorer the families are the less options they have to be flexible in relation to a more active fatherhood role during the working week as this equates to a loss of desperately needed earnings. The introduction of paid paternity leave and parental leave is essential to giving men and their partners the choice for the man to go beyond the provider role and be as fully active as fathers as possible. (184)*

Whilst parental leave is now a reality, albeit unpaid, the fact that specific paternity leave entitlements have yet to be realised is a hindrance to the work-life balance needs of all working fathers. This research also indicates that men in lower socio-economic strands have fewer opportunities to avail of work-life balance policies that do not imply a loss of pay or benefits (see Table 2.8 on differences between take-up of work-life balance according to socio-economic status).

## **2.5 Work-life balance and changes in the labour force**

This section will outline the changes in the labour market that have led to a shift in its demographic features and, consequently, to the promotion of work-life balance in order to accommodate the needs of a diversified workforce. This includes the increased participation of women in the labour force, including married mothers and lone parents. Data available from both international and national sources are outlined, in order to put information on Ireland in the context of international trends in labour-force participation.

### **2.5.1 Labour-force participation rates and work-life balance**

Labour-force participation rates highlight trends in economic activity as well as people's engagement in different forms of employment. This data is also useful because it is generally gender disaggregated, which means that specific knowledge on male and female economic activity can be known. It is necessary to briefly outline the characteristics of the workforce, so as to highlight current trends of flexible working.

The increased participation of women in the labour force has been a key factor in the development of work-life balance policies. Currently women represent over 40% of the

global labour force, with approximately 70% of women in developed countries, and 60% in developing countries, engaged in paid employment (International Labour Organisation (ILO) 2005). They are congregated at lower levels of employment, particularly in the developing countries, where they are often in the informal economy only. In terms of their access to positions of power, the ILO estimates that globally women hold between 1% and 3% of executive jobs in the largest corporations (*Ibid.*).

Cross-national quantitative data illustrates working trends on a wider scale, and highlights comparative and/or different trends across states. The following table highlights the latest data on working trends in EU and OECD countries:

**Table 2.2 Labour market trends of persons in employment as a percentage of the population of working age 2003 (%)**

Gender	European Union 15 countries	OECD total
Male	72.8%	74.7%
Female	56.1%	55.3%
Total	64.5%	64.9%

Source: Adapted from *OECD Factbook 2005*, available from <http://iris.sourceoecd.org/vl=3978541/cl=26/nw=1/rpsv/factbook/05-01-t01>

This data shows that throughout the world's economies, men are directly engaged in the labour force at significantly higher rates than women, which conversely means that women are more directly involved in non-labour market activity. The greater participation of women in care work (for children, the elderly, or the family in general) is undoubtedly a major factor in this differential.

Ireland's workforce has seen rapid changes in recent years, not only through economic growth, but also in the diversity of the workforce and their working patterns. One of the most striking changes in the labour force has been the rapid increase in participation by women, which has been attributed by many authors to the expansion of the service sector (see Fine-Davis *et al.* 2004, Drew, Emerek and Mahon 1998, Bakker 1994). The Central Statistics Office also highlights the fact that women have had higher participation rates in education than men over the last decade, which suggests sustained future expansion of the female labour force (CSO 2005). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2003) calls Ireland's economic growth the "Celtic Tigress" due to the significance of female labour-force participation in the expansion of the national economy.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) offers the most comprehensive data currently available on the Irish workforce via the Census and the Quarterly National Household Surveys (QNHS). The following bullet points outline the changes in the workforce according to recent statistics:

- the number of persons in employment has increasingly expanded in the last number of years - from 1,110,700 in 1988 to 1,908,300 in the first quarter of 2005
- there has been a greater increase in the female workforce than in the male workforce - a growth of 2.1% between 2003 and 2005 for females as opposed to a growth figure of 0.8% for males in the same period

- there have been fluctuating rates of people on home duties, with a net decrease in the number of people on home duties, indicating that fewer people are now involved in domestic roles than previously
- there are more females than males engaged in full-time studies - 196,400 females as opposed to 177,700 males
- there has been an increase in the number of retired people, and there is a distinct gender imbalance in this cohort, with males outnumbering females by over 3:1.

(QNHS, 1st quarter 2005.)

There is a general recognition that the expanding workforce is attributable to the diversification of the labour force in recent years, and has been largely driven by the increased participation of married women, including women returning to the workforce after an extended absence due to caring responsibilities (Drew and Emerek 1998: 89, Russell, Smyth, Lyons and O'Connell 2002, Callan 2005). Of the most recent labour force figures, (1st quarter 2005), the CSO remarked that:

*The most significant increase in participation was recorded for those aged 45-54 (73.9% to 75.7%), which was very much driven by increased female participation. There was an increase of 21,200 in the number of married women in the labour force and their participation rate rose by 1.9 percentage points from 48.8% to 50.7% [in comparison to the last quarter] (QNHS, 1st quarter 2005: 2).*

The participation rates of younger cohorts of women have risen steadily in the last number of years also. Just under two-thirds (64.5%) of those in the 20-24 year group were in employment in the first quarter of 2005, a rise of 3% since the first quarter of 2003. Women in the 25-34 year grouping had even higher rates of economic activity, with 74.2% in employment in the same quarter, which is an increase of 1.9% since the same period of 2003 (QNHS, 1st quarter 2005, Table 12: 15).

These statistics indicate that the trend for increased female labour-force participation will continue, particularly due to the high rates of women in education. This suggests that women's attachment to the labour force continues to strengthen, and that they are availing of employment opportunities later in life - factors that may be important for those facing a crisis pregnancy if they wish to continue their career path and become a parent.

### 2.5.2 Part-time working

In the European Union, 83% of part-time workers are women (ILO 2005). This average is compiled using consistent statistics from all member states, which demonstrate greater use of part-time work by women than by men.

In Ireland, part-time working has also fuelled the increase in women's participation in the labour force. Therefore, it must be noted also that although there have been increases in women's participation in the labour force, the differences in the kind of employment they are undertaking need to be highlighted. According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as of the last published Quarterly National Household Survey (1st Quarter, 2005):

- there were 69,800 males working in part-time employment

- there were 257,600 females working in part-time employment
- more than three times more women were working in part-time employment than men.

This indicates that in Ireland more women are availing of this option of flexible working than men, which is most probably due to the greater caring responsibilities undertaken by women than by men. It is also noteworthy that the number of women in part-time work has steadily increased, whereas the number of men working in this way has increased minimally in comparison. The CSO data demonstrates that between 2003 and 2005, the number of women engaged in part-time working increased by 26,000; the number of men working part-time increased only by 200 (QNHS, 1st quarter 2005: Table 1: 6). This data suggests that women are more likely to enter into part-time employment than men, a trend which may continue if working practices remain as they are.

### 2.5.3 Lone parents and the labour force

Difficulties in achieving work-life balance are experienced more acutely by lone parents, regardless of their gender. In Europe, women are the heads of households in nine out of ten single-parent families (ILO 2005). Therefore, they are responsible for lone-parent childcare in the majority of countries in the EU today. This means that women across the EU are in greater need of work-life balance policies that help them meet their childcare responsibilities. This impacts on policy throughout Europe as it is often directed at aiding women's work-life balance needs, with lesser emphasis on work-life balance needs of fathers.

The study *Babies and Bosses*, conducted by the OECD (2003), highlights different employment trends among lone parents. The study reveals that lone parents have lower employment participation rates in Ireland than Austria and Japan. The following table shows the disparities between participation rates in these three countries:

**Table 2.3 Employment among lone parents (%)**

Country	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002
Austria	68.2	64.6	73.2	78.1	81.7	81.1	–
Ireland*	–	31.2	33.4	40.7	43.2	45.1	44.9
Japan	–	82.6	86.7	84.6	83.6	–	–

– Data not available

\* Census of population for years 1986, 1991, 1996; Quarterly National Household Survey from 2000 onwards

Source: OECD (2003). *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life, Austria, Ireland and Japan*. OECD: Paris.

It can be seen from this data that while participation in the labour force has continuously increased for lone parents in Ireland, it is not yet comparable to the rates for the other two countries.

Data from the Central Statistics Office also reveals the differences between the employment rates of coupled parents as opposed to lone parents. According to the Quarterly National Household Survey (1st Quarter 2005, Table 23):

- a total of 315,900 female coupled parents were in employment, as compared to a total of 70,400 female lone parents - a ratio of almost 4.5:1

- a total of 495,200 male coupled parents were in employment, as compared to a total of 11,200 male lone parents, a ratio of over 44:1.

The OECD see this as partly a consequence of the nature of the social welfare benefits, which provide long-term support for single parents without any requirement to be available for and seeking employment. Incentives to work that currently exist through what are termed 'earnings disregards'<sup>8</sup> encourage lone parents to top up their welfare benefits through part-time or casual work rather than seeking full employment. This may be true, but it must be noted that the constraints of income and lack of access to childcare must also be seen as prohibitive factors for working. Added to this is the fact that research on lone parents has established that these households are experiencing the highest deprivation levels in Ireland as measured by the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions in 2003. Moreover, a recent study reported that 42% of lone-parent families are living in households where the income is less than 60% of the median level of family income in Ireland (Conroy and O'Leary 2005: 25).

The lack of participation by lone parents in employment thus cannot be solely attributed to a desire to stay out of the labour market, given the abundant literature on lone parents' aspirations to enter or sustain paid employment (McCashin 1996, Mahon *et al.* 1998, Kenny 1978). Evidently, lone parents are currently unable to avail of the increased opportunities for both full- and part-time work, especially prospects currently available to women in the Irish labour force, due to the difficulties they experience in combining their domestic responsibilities and their employment needs. This has led to a situation whereby lone parents are experiencing a number of financial problems, including over-indebtedness and inability to afford childcare (see Section 4.11 for further discussion of childcare costs), due to high levels of income poverty (Conroy and O'Leary 2005). Demand by lone parents for flexible working arrangements is bound to be high given the fact that they are more constrained in terms of time and finances than dual-earner couples. This will impact on those facing a crisis pregnancy if lone parenthood is a likely outcome as a result of the nature of the pregnancy. As the Crisis Pregnancy Agency has noted in relation to lone parents: "Flexibility on the part of employers is an important ingredient in the decision to continue with a pregnancy" (2004a: 30).

Respondents in the consultation process of the Crisis Pregnancy Agency to formulate a strategy to address such pregnancies reported that family friendly workplaces were seen as critical to lone parents (2003:25).

## 2.6 Drivers for work-life balance policies

In recent years employers have responded positively to demands for greater flexibility in employment practices in order to improve staff morale, retention and commitment (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 67). Indeed, some see them as imperative in order to maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace: "Against a background of a tightening labour market, the recruitment and retention of quality employees has become a major preoccupation of public and private sector employers" (Drew *et al.*

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<sup>8</sup> Earnings disregards mean that a person receiving the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) can earn up to €146.50 per week and may still qualify for full payment. If you earn between €146.50 and €293.00, you may qualify for a reduced payment. If you are in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment, and your earnings subsequently exceed €293.00 per week, you will continue to receive transitional half-rate payment for 6 months. See [www.welfare.ie/publications/sw19/sw19\\_sect3.html#3.7](http://www.welfare.ie/publications/sw19/sw19_sect3.html#3.7) for more information. For information on tax implications for earnings by OPFP recipients, see [www.welfare.ie/publications/sw19/sw19\\_sect1\\_05.html#1.2](http://www.welfare.ie/publications/sw19/sw19_sect1_05.html#1.2).

2003: 13). The presence of work-life balance policies can lead to the organisation being identified as an employer of choice, ensuring that the company will continuously attract employees (see section 2.8 below). Currently, organisations in the public sector and large private sector enterprises with a significant female workforce are most likely to have introduced flexible working policies (Work-life Balance Network 2004: 5), although both implementation and take-up vary greatly according to the type of sector. The level of demand, particularly in the public sector, is two-fold: it comes not only from employees, but also from the general public, who want longer opening hours for customer services. In the private sector, also, flexible working has been used as an essential part of the labour market supply-and-demand system (Drew *et al.* 2003).

Work-life balance policies are often implemented by organisations as a result of external drivers, internal drivers and social drivers, which often interact simultaneously to motivate policy directed at achieving work-life balance.

## **2.7 External drivers and work-life balance policies**

External drivers are motivating factors *outside* the organisation that lead it to implement work-life balance policies. These include:

### *2.7.1 Customer relations at a local level*

Organisations that implement flexible working arrangements can respond to demands from customers at a local level for extended opening hours. They can also increase production by using flexible working arrangements to operate on a 24-hour basis, thereby suiting the needs of a workforce engaged in diverse working patterns. For example, late-night shopping can accommodate shift-workers or others engaged in flexible working practices.

### *2.7.2 Public image of the organisation*

Work-life balance policies are often promoted to positively enhance an organisation's public image, and the motivation for implementing such policies is linked to the internal driver of being identified as an employer of choice (see section 2.8.1 below).

### *2.7.3 Competition from other organisations*

Work-life balance policies - particularly in relation to flexible working arrangements - can help an organisation to compete within the global economy by offering flexibility in supply of goods and services. They may also help to respond to increased or decreased supply of goods on a demand basis. Flexible working arrangements also allow organisations to operate across time zones, thus increasing the chances of international business.

### *2.7.4 Legislation*

As outlined above (see section 2.3), organisations must comply with national and international laws, which provide for work-life balance for employees. As yet in Ireland there are no laws making flexible working arrangements a statutory entitlement, thus work-life balance legislation that must be complied with by employers relates to leave arrangements, particularly those aimed at parents, and the Organisation of Working Time regulations.

## 2.8 Internal drivers and work-life balance policies

Internal drivers are motivating factors within the organisation, including:

### 2.8.1 *Employer of choice*

Being identified by employees (and potential employees) as an employer of choice is a concept that has gained in popularity in recent years. The Great Place to Work® Institute, Inc. is a research and management consultancy based in the U.S. with International Affiliate offices throughout the world, including Ireland. Annual lists of 'Best Companies to Work For' are compiled for Europe, North America, Latin America and Asia. In 2005, Boston Scientific was chosen as the best company to work for in Ireland. Identification as such an employer not only attracts high calibre employees, it also helps in the retention of existing experienced and talented staff, as well as enhancing corporate image.

### 2.8.2 *Cost benefit analyses*

The introduction of work-life balance policies has been shown to have tangible, cost-related benefits for organisations, particularly in terms of recruitment and training costs, which may be minimised if working practices help to retain experienced staff. Flexible working arrangements can also lead to greater productivity among staff, as well as a reduction in staff absences due to sickness or being unable to balance work and childcare arrangements.

### 2.8.3 *Employee health and well being*

Many employers are incorporating work-life balance policies as part of their health promotion policies, particularly in relation to a reduction in negative stress and consequent absenteeism. An important factor to consider is the stress experienced by those who have to contend with long commuting times, an occurrence that can be avoided or minimised by the adoption of flexible working times. Fine-Davis *et al.* (2004) argue that work-life balance has a direct relationship to the health and well being of the employee, as they found a significant relationship between potential flexibility in the workplace and workers' satisfaction with their health in their study (p239).

## 2.9 Social drivers and work-life balance policies

Social drivers are those facilitating factors that exist due to the characteristics of society, or those that motivate a company due to socially responsible attitudes towards workers:

### 2.9.1 *Demographic change*

As outlined previously, (see section 2.5.1), female participation in the labour force has partly fuelled the economy in recent years. Work-life balance policies that meet the needs of women, particularly mothers, are necessary to attract and retain women in the labour force. Flexible working arrangements may also appeal to older cohorts of workers, who are targeted as in need of such arrangements by the Forum on the Workplace of the Future (2005).

### 2.9.2 *Corporate responsibility*

On a positive note, it has been found by the OECD (2003) that the decision to introduce flexible working policies is not always due to cost-benefit analyses, but rather as a response to how the company feels it should behave as an employer. Evans (2001) found

in employer surveys that:

*... there was evidence that decisions in relation to the introduction of flexible work arrangements were taken for reasons of value, for example, a belief in the value of family life or the desire to treat employees in a 'holistic' way through recognising their need for work-life balance (in Drew et al. 2003: 23).*

In Ireland, the OECD gave the example of Aer Rianta as being a company that has taken a socially responsible approach to facilitating their employees' work-life balance needs (2003: 88-89). Drew *et al.* (2003) also identify research that defines the introduction of work-life balance initiatives in proactive terms on the part of the organisation, particularly when these changes are beyond statutory entitlements.

## 2.10 Work-life balance policies in practice

### 2.10.1 Availability and take-up of work-life balance policies

Take-up of flexible working arrangements is outlined in the OECD (2003) comparative study of Ireland, Japan and Austria. The vast gender disparity between take-up rates of flexible working is explained not only by traditional caring roles that see women engage in care responsibilities more than men, but also because of gendered labour-market segregation, which sees more women than men in part-time and flexible jobs concentrated at the lower end of the market (OECD 2003: 89). Ireland is similar to other EU countries in terms of a gender divide in the accessing of flexible work policies, with men tending to prefer options where there is no loss of pay or status, whilst women often opt for reductions in working hours and job sharing (Drew *et al.* 2003, Fine Davis *et al.* 2004).

The most comparative international data to Ireland is from the U.K., due to the historically similar nature of the labour market, and cultural similarities in working hours and styles. Also, as in Ireland, the public sector in the U.K. has been the driving force behind the implementation of work-life balance policies. For example, in a study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development it was found that only 26% of private sector organisations offered flexitime, compared to 79% of public sector organisations (2002a:1).

Evidence from the U.K. on take-up of work-life balance policies is outlined in the national study, the *Second Work-Life Balance Study*. This was the follow-up to the 2000 *Worklife Balance Baseline Study*, and was conducted in 2003. The study was based on 1,509 interviews with employers. Workplaces were randomly selected from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from employers in Great Britain with five or more employees. The figures were weighted to produce nationally representative estimates. The results of the 2003 study were presented in two separate reports: the *Second Work-Life Balance Study: Results from the Employees' Survey* (2004), and the *Second Work-Life Balance Study: Results from the Employers' Survey* (2004). These studies were undertaken to monitor change and to establish a robust baseline for future evaluations.

In relation to the employee survey, the following were the key findings:

- one sixth of employees had approached their employer in the last two years to make a request to change their working times

- these requests were most likely to be made by parents whose youngest child was under two years old; however, 29% of mothers had made such requests, as compared to 12% of fathers
- take-up of available flexible working practices increased from 2000, with flexitime (55%), working from home (54%), and term-time working (46%) having the highest take-up.

In relation to the employer survey, the key findings were that there had been an increase in the implementation of flexible working policies, and that having flexible working time arrangements formalised in written documents, although not widespread, increased employee take-up of flexible arrangements.

The results of these surveys show positive experiences of implementing work-life balance policies, ranging from recruitment to production. It is interesting to note that where these policies are implemented in a formal, structured way, employees avail of them more often. This may be because if they are integrated in such a way they will be seen as an employee right and not as a reward or an act of preferential kindness. This is important also for employees who do not have children: they may feel like they have to 'justify' requests for flexible working where there are no formal arrangements in place.

Of the quantitative data that exists for Ireland in relation to provision and take-up of work-life balance policies, the most prominent studies are the surveys carried out by the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) (2001), the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2002), and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP) (2003). Results from each survey will be considered in turn.

#### IBEC study

The Irish Business and Employers Confederation study was conducted on a sample of organisations in the manufacturing and wholesale distribution sectors. IBEC issued questionnaires to 673 companies, employing a total of 105,074 employees. A total of 488 companies responded, employing a total of 84,573 employees - a response rate of over 72%. They asked whether flexible working policies were in operation or under consideration, and the number of employees currently using flexible working arrangements. The following table summarises the results:

**Table 2.4 Availability of flexible working arrangements in IBEC respondents (%)**

Type of flexible work	% companies using or considering flexible work	% of total employees using flexible work arrangements
Permanent part-time	52%	2%
Shift work	28%	10%
Flexible hours	20%	1%
Job sharing	18%	1%
Flexitime	17%	4%
Career breaks/sabbaticals	11%	<1%
E-working	10%	<1%
Other type	2%	1%
Term-time working	1%	-

### ICTU study

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions carried out a survey on a sample of individual union members, the majority working within the public sector. A total of 4,790 questionnaires were sent to members, and a total of 825 were returned, a response rate of over 17%, which is a rather low research sample. Readers must be aware of the lack of generalisability that this low response rate results in. Of the respondents, 64.4% were public-sector employees, and 35.6% were private-sector employees. The survey questioned members about whether or not they had access to a range of flexible working arrangements, and, if so, how many of those respondents availed of them.

The following table summarises the results of the survey:

**Table 2.5 Availability and take-up of flexible working arrangements in ICTU respondents (%)**

Type of flexible work	Employees who have access to flexible work		Employees availing of flexible work	
	Number	%	Number	%
Job sharing/work sharing	419	50.8%	143	34.1%
Flexitime	322	39.0%	222	68.9%
Employment or career break	314	38.1%	1	0.3%
Shift work	246	39.8%	154	62.6%
Part-time work	233	28.2%	93	39.9%
Term-time work	188	22.8%	12	6.4%
Annualised hours	42	5.1%	15	35.7%
Teleworking/home working	16	1.9%	2	12.5%
Parental leave	N/A	N/A	75	9.1%
Carer's leave	N/A	N/A	0	0.0%

Note: the % availing of is expressed as the proportion of those respondents, in each case, who have access to the working arrangement. N/A - both Parental Leave and Carer's Leave are now statutory entitlements.

Source: Adapted from ICTU (2002). *Identifying Members' Childcare Needs*. ICTU: Dublin.

It can be seen from this data that the most widely available flexible working arrangement is job sharing. However, the most accessed flexible working arrangement, where available, is flexitime. Its greater popularity is undoubtedly due to the fact that it is a policy that allows workers flexibility to meet outside demands, whilst incurring no loss of pay or benefits, unlike many other flexible working policies. It is also a policy that is adaptable to the needs of the employee on a day-to-day basis, rather than a more 'fixed' flexibility implied by other flexible working arrangements, such as part-time or term-time working. Following closely behind flexitime in terms of rates of access is shift working. This may benefit the employee in terms of extra pay and travelling at off-peak hours, but it is a form of working that is generally set up in the structure of the organisation to meet business demands, and not to meet employee work-life balance demands.

### **National Centre for Partnership and Performance - employers' survey**

The National Centre for Partnership and Performance, in conjunction with the ESRI<sup>9</sup>, undertook surveys in 2003 on a sample of employers and employees. In the employers' sample (*The Changing Workplace: A Survey of Employers' Views and Experiences*), two surveys were conducted: a postal survey of private sector employers, and a postal survey followed by telephone calls to senior management in public sector organisations. They received 1,491 completed questionnaires from the private sector<sup>10</sup>, and 392 from the public sector organisations, a response rate of 67% for the latter group. The survey addressed a wide range of employee-oriented policies, including profit-sharing agreements, dispute-resolution procedures, explicit policies on equality and diversity, and work-life balance and flexible working arrangements. In the private sector, 40.5% of employers reported that they had implemented work-life balance policies, and 30.3% had introduced annualised hours systems to simultaneously meet employee and business needs. They also reported high usage of part-time staff (59.6%) and of temporary staff (35.4%). Temporary lay-offs according to production needs were also reported by 21.8% of private sector employers. Similar questions were not asked of the managers in the public sector questionnaire, thus it is only possible to compare the extent of work-life balance policies in both sectors from the data published on employees (see below). However, in terms of general attitudes to work-life balance, the report states approximately one quarter of senior personnel in the public sector believe that these policies are currently 'important' in addressing employee needs, and 57% stated that they expect work-life balance policies to become 'very important' over the next three years (NCP 2003a: 103).

### **National Centre for Partnership and Performance - employees' survey**

The incidence and usage of flexible working arrangements is available through the employee survey, (*The Changing Workplace: A Survey of Employees' Views and Experiences*). The employee survey was conducted via random telephone sampling of 11,716 telephone numbers, which resulted in a total of 5,198 valid questionnaires, a response rate of 46.5%. This sample is the largest employee research sample to date, and is thus the most nationally representative data that currently exists on the Irish workforce. The employee survey addressed a wide range of topics, including satisfaction with employment and employer, feelings of stress, workplace and domestic responsibilities, and loyalty to employment organisation. The authors conclude from the findings that the "results suggest there is substantial room for developing policies and employment practices to reduce stress levels among employees and to facilitate greater work/life balance" (NCP 2003b: 9). The following table details employee reported practices in their workplaces, according to sector and type of flexible practices:

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9 Authors of the report from the ESRI are: P.J. O'Connell, H. Russell, J. Williams and S. Blackwell.

10 There is no indication in the report of what response rate this represents.

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**Table 2.6 Workplace practices in the Irish labour force (%)**

Sector home (%)	Working from Flexitime (%)	Flexible hours/ Week on-off (%)	Job sharing/ hours (%)	Part-time
Public sector	15.0	47.7	58.0	61.3
Private sector	13.3	41.8	22.7	51.5
All sectors	13.6	42.9	29.5	53.4

Source: Adapted from National Centre for Partnership and Performance (2003b) *The Changing Workplace: A Survey of Employees' Views and Experiences*. NCPP: Dublin.

It can be seen from this data that the public and private sectors are similar in terms of the practice of working from home, but there are differences in the other categories, particularly in the job-sharing category where more than twice as many employees in the public sector are engaged in this form of working than in the private sector. Part-time working is also more common in the public than the private sector.

In terms of availability and take-up of flexible working arrangements, the employee survey outlines the extent of both according to socio-economic status.

Availability of flexible working practices and employee rates of take-up are summarised in the following two tables:

**Table 2.7 Availability of flexible workplace practices according to socio-economic status (%)**

Socio-economic status	Working from home (%)	Flexible hours/ Flexitime (%)	Job sharing/ Week on-off (%)	Part-time hours (%)
Higher prof. & managers	38.5	53.5	33.2	50.6
Lower professional	17.1	44.8	45.9	63.5
Other non-manual	15.2	47.8	37.6	61.8
Skilled manual	7.7	30.1	9.5	18.6
Semi-skilled manual	4.0	44.3	24.8	64.4
Unskilled manual	6.4	31.4	18.7	48.2
All	13.6	42.9	29.5	53.4

Source: Adapted from National Centre for Partnership and Performance (2003b) *The Changing Workplace: A Survey of Employees' Views and Experiences*. NCPP: Dublin.

**Table 2.8 Take-up of flexible workplace practices according to socio-economic status (%)\***

Socio-economic status	Working from home (%)	Flexible hours/ Flexitime (%)	Job sharing/ Week on-off (%)	Part-time hours (%)
Higher prof. & managers	68.5	58.9	12.2	19.4
Lower professional	61.6	57.9	23.9	29.7
Other non-manual	47.7	57.8	24.8	40.4
Skilled manual	72.7	54.9	22.3	29.4
Semi-skilled manual	65.4	51.1	18.8	50.1
Unskilled manual	83.1	69.1	31.3	66.5
All	61.6	56.9	22.2	40.3

\* These rates are as a percentage of employees working in organisations that currently have such flexible working practices  
Source: Adapted from National Centre for Partnership and Performance (2003b) *The Changing Workplace: A Survey of Employees' Views and Experiences*. NCPP: Dublin.

From this data, a number of interesting findings emerge:

- There are significant differences in availability of flexible working practices between the socio-economic categories. For example, flexitime is available to 53.5% of higher professionals and managers, but only 31.4% of unskilled manual workers.
- There are also significant differences between the professional/non-manual categories of workers in terms of availability of flexible working practices, particularly in relation to working from home. This suggests that this type of working arrangement is generally reserved for higher professionals and managers rather than more junior staff.
- Where flexible working practices are available, they are generally availed of at high rates. For example, although only 13.6% of employees have access to home working, 61.6% avail of this flexible working option.
- The least availed of option is job sharing, with only 22%; this could be due to the fact that it is often perceived as a more difficult arrangement to organise, and it also entails a loss of pay.
- Part-time working is availed of in low numbers by higher professionals and managers but in high numbers by unskilled manual workers. Whilst the data gives no concrete indication of why this may be the case, possible reasons for this will be further explored in Chapter 3.

## 2.11 Research findings on positive and negative experiences of work-life balance policies

### 2.11.1 Positive and negative experiences for employers

The benefits for employers in providing work-life balance policies have been outlined above in sections 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9 as possible drivers for the implementation of flexible working practices.

Research shows that some companies have adopted work-life balance policies in inventive ways and had positive results from doing so. The study undertaken by the Work in America Institute, *Holding a Job, Having a Life* (2000), highlights innovative companies that have extended their work-life balance policies to become part of the organisational structure. This has been done in order to achieve improvements in employees' work-life balance and to improve business performance. These organisations have achieved this by redesigning work, changing the organisational culture, improving HR systems, and integrating work-life balance goals with core business goals (in *Work-life Balance Network 2004*: 12). This confirms that structural change can precede cultural change if it is approached with consistency and determination.

Cross-national studies also highlight positive experiences as a result of the implementation of work-life balance policies. The OECD points out that the flexible policies introduced by Austria, Japan and Ireland have been seen to "motivate and increase productivity of the existing workforce, increase workforce flexibility to meet peak-time demand, attract and retain qualified staff" (2003: 20). However, they point to the fact that take-up of such policies is gendered, and workplace cultures are key sites of promotion or prohibition of such policies (see Chapter 3). In the U.K. it has been found that: "The evidence ... suggests that much can be learnt from those employers who have been able to implement work-life balance policies and practices and obtained business benefits from having done so. This suggests that work-life balance might be feasibly rolled out across the economy as a whole to the benefit of everyone: business, employees, and the economy" (Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham and Vivian 2000: 40). Other benefits can also accrue to the employer from the availability of flexible working arrangements in the organisation. For example, flexible working or sabbatical leave time for education and training purposes improves the personal skills of the worker, which will/may then be used within the organisation, thus improving the organisation itself.

The *Second Work-Life Balance Study* (2004) of U.K. workplaces charted attitudes of employers to their experience of implementing work-life balance policies.

In relation to the employer survey, evidence of the business benefits of implementing work-life balance policies is shown in the following key findings:

- the overriding benefit reported by employers was a 'happier workforce' (29%)
- 94% of employers thought people worked best when they could balance their work and home life
- the majority of employers reported that work-life balance policies had a positive impact on employee relations (71%), employee commitment and motivation (69%) and labour turnover (54%)
- Nearly half of the employers stated that work-life balance practices that had been implemented had a positive effect on recruitment (47%), absenteeism (48%) and productivity (49%).

The results show that employers generally espoused positive experiences of work-life balance policies to date, and most importantly, they saw both business benefits and personal benefits for employees as a result of these policies.

Drew *et al.* (2003) undertook a study commissioned by the National Framework Committee on Family Friendly Policies to assess work-life balance policies in Ireland in terms of their extent and their take-up. Their study comprised of a review of literature and policy, and two surveys, one on employers and the other on employees (in both the public and private sector), in order to assess flexible working arrangements in Ireland (see Table 2.9 below for details on research sample). The authors used multiple data-collection methods, including postal questionnaires and focus groups, in order to strengthen and validate their findings. The authors point to the fact that quantitative data on work-life balance initiatives is not readily available due to the fact that many employers are not systematically collecting the data needed to assess the costs and benefits of flexible working arrangements (Drew *et al.* 2003: 23). Evidence of their benefits, or otherwise, is generally anecdotal and attitudinal in nature, and therefore it is impossible in many cases to achieve a precise analysis of their effects. This is something that must be initiated in order to both assess impact so far and to critique and improve flexible working policies.

In the employer survey, Drew *et al.* (2003) used a stratified sample delineated according to size and public or private sector status. Out of a total of 3,780 questionnaires sent to employers, 912 responded (a response rate of 24%). The following table shows a breakdown of the respondents:

**Table 2.9 Respondents according to public or private sector status (n)**

Employment sector	Number of organisations	Percent of total
Manufacturing	315	35%
Public services	167	18%
Private services	410	45%
Not stated	20	2%
Total	912	100%

Source: Drew *et al.* (2003). *Off The Treadmill*. National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies: Dublin

A total of 158 (17%) of the organisations surveyed employed more than 500 workers. Of these, 99 were public-sector and 59 were private-sector employers.

Thirty-six per cent were small organisations, employing less than 100 staff. The majority of these (90%) were private-sector companies.

Out of the responding employers, a majority (66%) supported the statement that 'everyone should be able to balance work and home life' (2003: 62). Of those that disagreed, 30% disagreed, and 4% disagreed strongly. This compares to U.K. data (see above Second Work-life Balance Survey 2004), but with slightly higher rates of agreement with such a statement by Irish employers. Perceptions by the employers of the potential benefits of flexible working arrangements were also investigated by the study. The following table summarises responses on the potential benefits of implementing flexible working policies:

**Table 2.10 Perceptions of employers regarding potential benefits in relation to implementing flexible working arrangements (n and %)**

Potential benefit	Yes	No	Don't know	Total*
Employee satisfaction	486 (85%)	52 (9%)	36 (6%)	574 (100%)
Attracting/retaining employees	391 (74%)	92 (17%)	46 (9%)	529 (100%)
Employee productivity	289 (58%)	122 (25%)	84 (17%)	495 (100%)
Labour turnover	247 (55%)	128 (28%)	76 (17%)	452 (100%)
Improving your reputation	243 (56%)	119 (27%)	76 (17%)	438 (100%)
Absenteeism/sick leave	229 (50%)	133 (29%)	95 (21%)	457 (100%)
Improved business results	178 (44%)	118 (29%)	111 (27%)	407 (100%)
Competitive pressures	144 (37%)	156 (40%)	91 (23%)	391 (100%)
Other benefit	10 (14%)	33 (45%)	30 (41%)	73 (100%)

\* Total means the total number of respondents for that question, not the total number of respondents for the questionnaire. Source: Adapted from Drew et al. (2003). *Off The Treadmill*. National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies: Dublin.

From this data it can be seen that employers perceived that the benefit to employees in terms of their satisfaction in employment was the greatest benefit to be gained from implementing work-life balance policies. Other benefits are also located within human-resource frameworks, such as retention of staff and reduced leave. Potential business benefits were espoused with less enthusiasm, and although employers did see potentially improved business results, they were slightly less convinced of the benefit in competitive pressures.

A dominant theme in the national literature is the apparent contradiction between employer and employee needs and wants. There has been a plethora of empirical and theoretical studies examining how companies, both large and small, can implement work-life balance policies for their workers without damaging their business, namely their profit shares and their established customer relations (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005, NCPP 2003a, IBEC 2002, Fisher 2000). As demonstrated in the literature, organisations that adopt innovative work practices have benefited from high performance outcomes. The Forum on the Workplace of the Future includes work-life balance policies, along with greater employee financial and management involvement in an organisation, as constituting comprehensive 'bundles' of work practices that are currently yielding successful returns, but are being missed out on by companies that do not engage in systematic workplace change (2005: xii).

Part of the reason for the perception that work-life balance policies are incompatible with business needs, or some businesses, is that there is a need for greater levels of

support for enterprises implementing these policies. Many businesses do not immediately or obviously see the benefits of these policies, but rather focus on the extra costs and difficulties that would be encountered if they attempted to implement them. This is because many need to have tailored advice on how - or why - they should try to adopt these policies. It is also necessary to develop indicators of success for these policies that can be tangible proof of whether a company is benefiting or not from adopting work-life balance arrangements.

Drew *et al.* (2003) collected data from employers on the potential constraints to implementing work-life balance policies in their companies. The perceptions of these potential constraints indicate employer fears about these policies and their perception of the priority to be given to implementing them. Table 2.11 below summarises the employers' responses.

**Table 2.11 Perceptions of employers regarding potential constraints in relation to implementing flexible working arrangements (n and %)**

Potential constraint	Yes	No	Don't know	Total*
Complexity of implementation	367 (60%)	221 (35%)	27 (4%)	615 (100%)
Lack of demand by employees	354 (58%)	209 (34%)	43 (7%)	606 (100%)
Competing organisational priorities	351 (62%)	180 (32%)	38 (7%)	569 (100%)
Organisation is too small	278 (48%)	279 (48%)	28 (5%)	585 (100%)
Financial resources involved	218 (40%)	293 (53%)	41 (7%)	552 (100%)
Lead to disputes among employees	213 (38%)	295 (53%)	51 (9%)	559 (100%)
Low utilisation by employees	174 (35%)	275 (55%)	56 (11%)	505 (100%)
Management's attitudes	110 (22%)	369 (72%)	32 (6%)	511 (100%)
Lack of accessible information	72 (15%)	358 (74%)	54 (11%)	484 (100%)
Other constraints	43 (100%)	-	-	43 (100%)

\* Total means the total number of respondents for that question, not the total number of respondents for the questionnaire. Source: Adapted from Drew *et al.* (2003). *Off The Treadmill*. National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies: Dublin.

This data suggests that implementing flexible working arrangements is perceived as a complex process that may not receive priority over other organisational demands by a majority of employers (60%). On a more positive note, it is evident that employers are mostly (74%) aware of relevant information on flexible working. What is not clear from the data is whether or not the employers' perceptions of the low desire for, and potential use of, flexible working by employees is a true representation of employees' feelings on the matter.

### 2.11.2 Positive and negative experiences for employees

The study *Fathers and Mothers: Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance* (Fine Davis *et al.* 2004) found that it was much easier in Denmark than in Ireland, Italy or France to combine employment and domestic responsibilities, due to the fact that childcare is a public

responsibility and flexible working arrangements are commonplace. The study also highlights a gender divide in the labour force that benefits men more than women, particularly in relation to managing work: “The organisation of work, the degree of autonomy at work, the degree that the job is fixed to one place, the ways payments-systems are organised, and so on, consistently offer better opportunities for men than for women...” (2004: 50). The authors highlight the psychological benefits to employees of knowing that they are able to access work-life balance policies. A total of 400 people participated in the questionnaires, all of whom had at least one child under the age of six and lived with their partner, who was also in employment. Of the research sample, 48% worked in the public sector and 52% worked in the private sector. Participants were asked a range of questions relating to situations that would require flexibility in their working conditions. The following tables outline the positive responses from the four countries on potential and actual flexibility:

**Table 2.12 Potential flexibility: % answering “yes” by country (n= 400)**

Flexibility	France %	Italy %	Denmark %	Ireland %	All countries %		
					Male	Female	Total
Acceptability of making private calls	92.9	84.0	100.0	90.1	95.0	88.5	91.7
Acceptability of running private errands	31.0	28.0	69.0	54.5	53.7	37.3	45.5
Possibility of owing work time	43.0	50.0	80.0	50.0	52.5	59.0	55.8
Formal agreement of flexible time	54.5	18.2	24.0	21.0	28.0	31.0	29.5
Informal agreement of flexible time	52.0	20.8	52.0	60.0	43.5	49.2	46.3
Possibility of swapping shifts	35.0	49.5	47.0	31.0	39.5	41.7	40.6

**Table 2.13 Actual flexibility: % answering “yes” by country (n=400)**

Flexibility	France %	Italy %	Denmark %	Ireland %	All countries %		
					Male	Female	Total
Make private calls	89.0	87.0	100.0	91.0	94.0	89.5	91.8
Run private errands	38.0	24.0	55.0	60.0	54.5	34.5	44.5
Leave early/arrive late due to childcare problems	76.0	69.0	79.0	75.0	73.5	76.4	74.9
Bring a child to work	9.1	12.0	36.0	15.0	14.5	21.6	18.0

These results show that there are gender differences between what workers perceive might be hypothetically acceptable in the workplace, and what their actual experience of flexibility is in the workplace. It shows that in all four countries there are gender differences in potential and actual behaviours. In potential flexibility:

- men perceive that they are more likely to be able to make private phone calls and run private errands
- women potentially see themselves as being able to have more flexibility in terms of swapping shifts or owing time
- women are also slightly more likely to have formal and informal flexibility arrangements.

In terms of actual behaviours:

- men are more likely to be able to make private calls and run private errands, but
- women are more likely to be able to arrive late or leave early due to childcare arrangements, or bring a child to work if childcare arrangements break down.

These gender differences are perhaps due to the greater likelihood that women will have responsibility for family caring arrangements, and a greater recognition of the need to accommodate these responsibilities.

The differences between the countries are also interesting:

- Irish respondents were more likely to report being potentially able to make private calls than the Italian respondents, but less likely than them to be able to swap shifts
- Irish workers have similar rates to Danish and Italian workers in terms of having formal agreements for flexible working, with France having much higher rates than the three other countries
- all the countries had fairly similar rates of being able to leave early or arrive late due to childcare arrangements
- Irish workers were also less likely to be able to bring a child to work than their Danish counterparts, but were more likely to be able to do so than their Italian and French peers.

The more negative aspects of work-life balance policies have been addressed in international literature. Walby (1997), speaking of the U.K. labour force, points to the fact that flexible working can prolong inequalities in the workforce due to its highly gendered nature:

*The majority of the numerically flexible workforce is female, and in this way flexibility is gendered. The growth of flexibility has been dependent on the availability of women as part-time workers. This is bound up with women's increased paid employment, but the part-time form which has so expanded leaves women vulnerable to poor wages and conditions (Walby 1997:79).*

The restrictions this places on women's employment options are detrimental, not only financially, but also in terms of the potential effects it can have on their work-life balance. Many of these practices will inhibit individual workers' quality of work-life balance, as well as impose difficulties for them in accessing childcare services that match non-standard or extended working hours. This issue is highlighted by the

Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT), who suggest that in order for flexible working arrangements to be categorised as family friendly they must be genuinely directed towards the needs of the employees and agreed upon by both employers and employees (in Drew *et al.* 2003: 19).

Even with the problems often encountered with flexible working, women often choose flexible working, such as part-time and job sharing, in order to create a balance between caring and work responsibilities. This is a different proposition from being an expression of what women *want* in their working lives. They are merely making the most appropriate choice available to them. As O'Connor points out:

*Implicit in many discussions about women's employment lies the assumption that flexible, (low-paid) work is what women 'want', since this is most compatible with their family responsibilities. It is difficult to envisage a situation where women's preferences would be for low-paid employment (1999: 188-189).*

The Forum on the Workplace of the Future (2005) has highlighted the fact that disadvantages of flexible working arrangements for employees include less company sponsored training, less participation in organisational structures, and less information from management. As women are more likely to take up flexible working arrangements, they are also more likely to experience the negative aspects of flexible working policies.

Drew *et al.*'s (2003) survey of employees' attitudes to and experiences of work-life balance policies reveals both positive and negative experiences. The employee survey was carried out in five selected organisations:

- Eircom (sample of 1,200 employees)
- Dublin City Council (sample of 1,200 employees)
- IBM (sample of 1,000 employees)
- Hibernian Life and Pensions (all 500 employees)
- ARUP Consulting Engineers (all 400 employees).

A mailed questionnaire was sent to 4,300 workers from these organisations. Of this total, 1,006 completed questionnaires were received back - an average response rate of 23%, although ranging within the companies from 18% (Eircom) to 36% (ARUP). This research sample represents a diversified sample in terms of geographical area, economic activity and occupational group. Response rates of this kind are usual for postal questionnaires (Neuman 2000). Of these respondents, 560 were male (56%), and 441 were female (44%).

Accessing flexible work arrangements, such as reduced hours and working from home, were ranked as important by both men and women in the survey, with flexible full-time working arrangements awarded most importance by both (Drew *et al.* 2003: 99). There was also strong agreement that colleagues respected outside/personal commitments, with 78% of respondents asserting this to be the case (2003: 104). The barriers for workers in availing of family friendly working arrangements were identified in the study as:

- lack of knowledge of what is available or acceptable
- lack of supporting infrastructure and technology
- heavy workloads
- concern in relation to the reaction of managers and colleagues

- concern in relation to career prospects
- not being able to afford options that would imply a reduction in income.

In terms of attitudes and experience of flexible working arrangements, employees in the survey outlined a range of possible negative outcomes of flexible working for employees including:

- problems in communicating with other workers
- problems in accessing the proper equipment to work from home
- fewer benefits, including potential erosion of pensions
- lower earnings with some flexible options
- negative perceptions of their work ethic and commitment by colleagues
- less recognition for a job well done
- lack of involvement in decision-making
- potential abuses of the flexi system by co-workers.

It was also felt that working part-time in particular was detrimental to career progression - over 70% of respondents felt this was the case (2003: 105).

The difficulties of combining work and family life lead some workers to significantly alter their decisions about whether to have children or not, and if so, how many. The OECD points out that: "For some (potential) parents having children (or having as many as desired) and fulfilling labour market aspirations have been mutually exclusive activities" (2003: 10). This may be the view of many facing unplanned reproductive choices in the context of a workplace that is not supportive of work-life balance.

## 2.12 Summary of chapter two

- Legislation in Ireland has sought to improve work-life balance for parents through extension of maternity leave and the introduction of parental leave. The European Union has been instrumental in this process, particularly in the directive on parental leave.
- Paternity leave is still not a statutory entitlement and is at the discretion of the employer, unless leave is sought due to the death of a spouse in childbirth or within 22 weeks of birth. The lack of statutory provision for fathers enshrines a gender imbalance that is not mitigated by improvements in parental leave, as mothers are entitled to access this as well.
- Ireland's legislation does not currently provide for entitlement, or entitlement to request, flexible working arrangements, as in the U.K. through the Employment Act 2002. This may be a significant factor for those facing a crisis pregnancy if they feel they will not be able to balance parenthood with their current working arrangements.
- The labour force in Ireland has grown over the last number of years, with a greater total rise in female employment than in male employment. However, greater rates of male employment in Ireland are comparable with the EU and other OECD countries.
- More women than men work part-time throughout the European Union. This is also the situation in Ireland, as among those currently working part-time women outnumber men by over 3:1.

- There are lower rates of lone parents in the workforce in Ireland than in other EU countries. This is a particularly relevant issue for those facing a crisis pregnancy if they are facing lone parenthood as a consequence.
- Evidence from recent research on work-life balance and flexible working arrangements suggests that there are three types of drivers for organisations in implementing work-life balance policies: internal drivers, external drivers and social drivers. All work in combination to influence, or impel, employers to adopt flexible working practices.
- Thus far, there is evidence to suggest many positive experiences of work-life balance arrangements for both employers and employees. These include greater flexibility of service, enhanced well being/happiness for employees, positive corporate image and social and community benefits.
- Negative experiences have also been reported in the literature for both employers and employees. Employers often find the organisation and implementation of flexible working arrangements difficult, and need support to do so successfully. Employees are often disadvantaged through flexible working arrangements if these are within sectors that are insecure or poorly paid. Given the fact that more women than men currently work flexibly, (especially part-time), they experience negative aspects of flexible working arrangements to a greater extent than men.
- The presence or absence of work-life balance policies may have an impact on the reproductive choices parents and prospective parents will make. Evidence from the OECD (2003) shows that it is common for individuals to limit their family size, or not become parents at all, due to their perception that it is incompatible with working life. If better reconciliation between the home and the workplace can be facilitated by work-life balance policies, it may influence individuals to go through with an unplanned pregnancy or encourage people to have the family size they desire.

### 2.13 Conclusions

Work-life balance policies will potentially have an impact on those facing a crisis pregnancy. If work-life balance policies and flexible working arrangements operate successfully within an organisation, it may increase the options available to those facing unplanned reproductive choices. If it is feasible to become a parent and have a career, some may continue with the pregnancy. Such arrangements will be particularly important to those who have limited personal support systems, such as relatives who will perform childminding (see section 4.2 for further discussion of this issue), as flexibility in working hours is generally required to access childcare facilities, i.e. to be able to comply with opening and closing times. Work-life balance policies, therefore, may enhance feelings of being able to cope with an unplanned child.

Work-life balance is a policy that will undoubtedly become an embedded feature of workplaces of the future, both nationally and in industrialised economies internationally. This bodes well for those facing unplanned pregnancies in the future, as the perception of work being at odds with parenthood may lessen as these arrangements become more widespread and normative. The literature shows that flexible working arrangements can have positive effects on employees' well being as they may be better able to balance the

demands of work and home life by participating in such working arrangements. The range of flexible working policies available suits the needs of a diverse workforce in many different ways. For example, flexitime may suit those who commute long distances to work, as well as those who need to accommodate childcare arrangements in their schedule.

The literature also highlights the potential negative aspects of current flexible working trends, such as instability of tenure, low pay and low-status employment opportunities. Some policies may also be geared more to meeting the needs of the employer, such as shift working, annualised hours and temporary or contract staff used in order to meet production demands. There are also gendered dimensions to flexible working arrangements as more women than men avail of work-life balance policies, and are congregated in the lower status, lower paid flexible full-time jobs. However, the ultimate aim of most work-life balance policies is to match the needs of employers and employees in formulating working arrangements, and this is achieved to varying degrees through flexible working policies.

## 3.0 Literature and findings on workplace culture

### 3.1 Introduction

Workplace culture is the organisational environment within which working roles are played out and workplace norms are created. The ethos of the organisation can determine whether or not work-life balance and maternity/childcare policies are adopted by the organisation. Workplace culture can be either a supportive or inhibitive environment for implementing work-life balance policies, family friendly working arrangements, and provision and acceptance of maternity and childcare commitments. It is therefore an important factor for those facing unplanned reproductive choices, including those who interpret their pregnancy as a crisis.

Literature on workplace cultures demonstrates the complexities of this theme. Studies address attitudinal responses to work policies and practices, from the perspective of employers and employees, as well differences in the public and private sector. There are a number of attitudinal issues within this theme, including perspectives of managers and employees to the commitment and status of flexible workers, the types of flexibility supported in the organisation, and who may access them. Literature on workplace culture also addresses pervasive trends in employment practices such as 'presenteeism' and management styles and practices that can support or constrain the implementation and accessing of work-life balance policies. Workplace cultures are shaped by both formal structural policies regulating work life, as well as more informal policies; thus it is important to examine the attitudes and experiences of all levels of staff in order to elucidate trends in contemporary workplace cultures.

There is evidence also of what is known as 'the long-hours culture', a reference to the fact that patterns of working in Ireland (and, indeed, in most of the Western economies) are premised on the traditional model of a male career and lifestyle, stressing long hours, fixed schedules, overtime etc. Long-hours cultures do not incorporate current patterns of working where childcare responsibilities and/or work-life balance needs must be taken into account (Drew *et al.* 2003: 12, O'Connor 1999: 237). Such norms of working are difficult to challenge, as they have been repeated to such an extent that they are now seen as the 'normal' and expected ways of working.

It is evident from the literature that what is needed is a radical change in the structures, ethos and practices of current workplace cultures in order to achieve more work-life balance, and to enhance the economy's adaptability and modernity. The *Working To Our Advantage* (2005) report outlines nine key attributes that will be hallmarks of successful workplaces in the future, regardless of size or whether they are in the public or private sector. Organisations of the future must be:

- agile
- customer-centred
- knowledge intensive
- responsive to employee needs
- networked
- highly productive
- involved and participatory

- continually learning
- pro-actively diverse.

As can be seen from this list, an organisation's workplace culture will be critical in order to achieve this profile. Many of the characteristics are associated with policies and attitudes rather than econometric measures. It is also noteworthy that attributes needed to successfully implement and sustain work-life balance practices will be similarly needed to achieve this profile: an environment open to change and learning; an ethos that promotes diversity among both people and working practices; a responsive environment capable of agility. It is similarly noteworthy that some of the attributes outlined, particularly to do with networking, customer orientation and productivity, have been shown in the literature to be *results* of implementing work-life balance policies (NCP 2003a, Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005 *inter alia*).

### 3.2 Impacts on those facing a crisis pregnancy

In relation to workers facing crisis pregnancy, the attitudinal environment in which they work may actually influence whether an unplanned pregnancy is interpreted as crisis or not. Darling places the decision of whether a pregnant woman can remain in her employment as one of the main decisions she must face: "Another decision to make is whether she can remain in her present environment and job, and, if not, where will she go" (1984: 28). The literature shows that this situation, i.e. of whether or not the workplace culture will be supportive of an unplanned pregnancy or not, has remained constant. In Mahon *et al.*'s (1998) study, the respondents felt that the "world in which their careers were developing was not seen as a child friendly one ... not seen as able to accommodate a child" (1998: 298). Similarly, Murphy-Lawless *et al.* (2004) found that the importance of employment in women's lives is a contributing factor in delaying childbirth, which means that they see their workplace culture as prohibitive of having a family rather than supportive. Thus the workplace culture may or may not be perceived as a supportive environment by those facing a crisis pregnancy, and either way this can have an impact on those in this situation.

Official organisational support for work-life balance policies will determine the perceptions of those facing a crisis pregnancy as to whether their organisation will be supportive to them if they become working parents. This may influence whether they decide to continue with the pregnancy or not. Their relationship with their manager(s) can be hypothesised from the literature as having a significant impact on their experience of their workplace, and if this relationship is supportive and/or open, it may influence the decisions they make about their crisis pregnancy. The take-up of flexible working policies by existing parents will demonstrate the reality of this type of working for employed parents, and they may consider their colleagues' experience of flexible working as a baseline in making a decision about their crisis pregnancy. As mentioned previously, (see sections 2.2 and 2.11.2) for women facing a crisis pregnancy, they may particularly look to the example of mothers in their workplace - their experience of re-entering the workforce after childbirth, of balancing work and family life, of accessing leave entitlements, and of accommodating unexpected childcare crises. They will also assess how these working mothers are perceived and treated by their employer and colleagues.

All these factors will have an impact on their perceptions of their own ability to cope with

a child if they continue with the pregnancy. If women in their workplaces have experienced negative attitudes or barriers to their career whilst trying to combine work and family life, this may also have an impact on the decision to continue with the pregnancy or not, or to keep the child or give it up for adoption. In addition, the experience of lone parents in the workplace will have an effect on those facing a crisis pregnancy for whom lone parenthood is a possibility.

Attitudes, particularly to paternity leave and take-up of flexible working by men, will have an effect on males who are facing a crisis pregnancy with their partner. Given the evidence of the lesser availability and ad hoc nature of paternity leave, and the greater stigma attached to accessing it where available, we can assume that the workplace culture will play a role in decisions made by males as to their time involvement if the pregnancy is continued with. Flexible working arrangements for men that are easy to access and supported within the workplace environment may make it seem easier to cope with an unexpected pregnancy. Attitudes towards childcare needs - either by alternating childcare with the mother or by allowing for compatibility with childcare centres - will also impact on the decision-making process.

### **3.3 Legislative context - international and national**

#### *3.3.1 International legislative context*

When discussing legislation on workplace culture, it is necessary to state the limitations of any legislation that attempts to regulate relations between people, or environments and atmospheres in a workplace. Legislation covering workplace culture is mainly directed at sustaining equality of opportunity, ensuring equal rights, and prohibiting all overt forms of discrimination. Part of the problem is that while this legislation is necessary to establish formalised, acceptable standards of behaviour in work, legislation alone cannot achieve changes in workplace cultures. Legislation is thus the first step - albeit an important one - to change. Most significantly, it is the interpretation and support legislation receives in an organisation that determines its position and importance in the workplace culture. Changes in legislation that are not implemented with enthusiasm and rigour, or supported in the long-term to the fullest degree, will fail to change workplace cultures.

The European Union has implemented legislation that covers employee rights in the workplace, including their working hours and conditions. This includes the Working Time Directive, which legislates for maximum working hours that can only be waived with the consent of the employee. Employees can only work 48 hours a week (based on an average over four to six months, depending on occupation). Only the U.K. has an opt-out from the regulations, which allows workers to sign a waiver in order to work longer hours. The Irish Government has committed to adopting the EU Council Directive 2002/14/EC on Employee Information and Consultation. The Directive provides a general framework for information and consultation of employees on matters that affect them. Subjects upon which employees must be informed and consulted include:

- recent and probable development of the establishment's activities and economic situation
- the situation and probable development of employment within the undertaking and any anticipatory measures envisaged, in particular where there is a threat to employment

- decisions likely to lead to substantial changes in work organisation or in contractual relations.

Consultations with the social partners on this issue have been initiated and are ongoing (ICTU 2005). (See section 3.4.2 below for discussion of communication within the workplace.)

Ireland has adopted the EU employment related equality directives for combatting discrimination in the workplace, as well as a general framework for the prohibition of discrimination in relation to employment on grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation (Framework Employment Directive). Ireland has also committed to update certain aspects of the 1975 Equal Pay and the 1976 Equal Treatment Directives, which provide for the prohibition of discrimination in relation to employment on grounds of gender (Gender Equal Treatment Directive)<sup>11</sup>. Ireland has adopted EU equality initiatives in order to improve employee rights as well as workplace environments. It is likely that there will be a continued drive towards achieving equality within the EU parliament, and thus Ireland's equality framework will be extended accordingly.

### 3.3.2 National legislative context

The Equality Authority is an independent body set up under the Employment Equality Act 1998. It was established in October 1999 to replace the Employment Equality Agency. The Equality Authority has the mandate to promote and defend the rights established in equality legislation. The Employment Equality Acts of 1998 and 2004 ensure equality between employees and prohibit discrimination. The acts have a broad scope and legislate over all aspects of the workplace, from recruitment and selection processes to dispute resolution procedures. They also prohibit discrimination in pay on nine grounds including age, race, gender and sexual orientation. These acts ensure that an environment of equality and fairness is promoted in all industries, both public and private. In the context of workplace cultures, employees can be protected from discrimination that arises as a result of their pregnancy, a particularly important aspect for those facing an unplanned or crisis pregnancy.

The Equal Status Act (2000) seeks to promote equality and prohibit discrimination on the same nine specific grounds as the Employment Equality Acts (although it does not cover employment). This is a broader equality act than the Employment Equality Acts but it similarly ensures equality in all areas in how people are treated.

The Equal Status Act and the Employment Equality Acts are related to workplace cultures in that they proscribe behaviours or practices that discriminate against people or that hinder their equal opportunities. This establishes a legislative context for democratic procedures within the workplace, and should ensure that all workplace cultures are experienced as open to diversity and equality of opportunity. However, as stated previously, these acts cannot legislate over attitudes and behaviours that may contribute to negative workplace environments, such as the long-hours culture in many organisations that is accepted by many as a means to promotion (Drew *et al.* 2003, Bacik, Costello and Drew 2003, Bunting 2004). Many aspects of workplace culture are less tangible than obvious discriminatory behaviours such as discrimination in pay and conditions, and thus impossible to legislate for.

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<sup>11</sup> Information available from <http://www.ictu.ie/html/publications/SP/workplace.htm>

### 3.4 Working practices and workplace culture

#### 3.4.1 Hours of work and the 'long-hours culture'

Recent data indicates that the Irish are the “work horses of Europe” and are working the longest hours in the European Union.<sup>12</sup> The evidence comes from a cross-national report by the Work Foundation (2005) entitled *Still At Work?* based on data from the year 2000 on one thousand workers in a full range of occupational sectors in fifteen EU countries. This study found that just over 6% of males and 4% of females in Ireland work over 60 hours a week, despite the implementation of the Working Time Directive in Ireland limiting most occupations to a 48-hour week. Across the countries studied it was found that:

- the longest hours worked were in Ireland, followed by the UK and Portugal
- Belgium and the Netherlands are the only countries that can be considered averse to a long-hours culture
- industry-sector, occupational status and country-specific factors are all fundamental to both the incidence and extent of long working hours
- overall, men worked more hours than women outside the home
- there were significant differences in the hours worked by women between the countries
- the differences in hours worked by men between the countries was not significant
- between both males and females, working long hours (over 60 per week) was commensurate with low job satisfaction
- private-sector employees were more likely to work longer hours than public sector employees.

LABORSTA, an International Labour Office database on labour statistics operated by the International Labour Organisation Bureau of Statistics, provides longitudinal data on Ireland's paid labour force working hours. Below is a summary of the data, disaggregated by gender.

**Table 3.1 Hours worked by Irish labour force (h)**

Employee Gender	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total (men and women)	41.1	40.9	41.1	40.1	38.8	38.1	38.0	37.9	37.7	37.9
Men	45.2	45.2	45.2	44.4	43.1	42.3	42.0	42.1	41.9	41.3
Women	34.7	34.3	34.8	34.0	33.1	32.7	32.8	32.5	32.4	32.1

Source: Statistics available from [www.laborsta.ilo.org/cgi-bin/brokerv8.exe](http://www.laborsta.ilo.org/cgi-bin/brokerv8.exe)

From this data we can see that men on average work more hours than women, a fact also supported by the OECD (2003: 14). However, it must be noted that this data does not allow for a nuanced analysis of differences between occupations. Moreover, the greater

<sup>12</sup> 'Irish workers clock up the longest hours in Europe', April 10th 2005, article in The Times, available from <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2095-1562096,00.html>

participation of women in part-time work contributes to a lower average number of hours for women.

Although long working hours are reported in the literature, there is accompanying evidence from employees of a desire for shorter hours. The study, prepared by Bielinksi (1999) for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions on the 15 member states at that time, (plus Norway), illustrates clearly the desire for fewer working hours throughout Europe. The research found that employees in the countries surveyed were working an average of 39 hours, but desired to work only 34 hours a week. Women returners desired even fewer working hours per week - an average of 27.9 hours. These results show that overall, employees in the E.U. would prefer to work less than they actually do, and this is undoubtedly a response to the pressures of combining work with other responsibilities and interests.

In the U.K., Bunting has examined the extent of overworking in a range of occupations. She has found that workers are often not taking their full length of holiday time, and that the average lunch break is now estimated to be twenty-seven minutes long (2004: 9-10). Bunting also argues that rather than seeing these working practices as individually determined, workplace cultures should be viewed as the key to determining the length of an individual's working hours:

*For the vast majority there is a degree of choice in how hard they work. But the choices we make are not made in isolation: they are a product of the particular organisational culture of our workplaces, which promote concepts of success, of team spirit so we don't let our colleagues down, and a powerful work ethic. (2004: xxiv)*

Thus, what is seen as an individual choice in terms of working long hours can also be viewed as an endemic feature of the modern workplace culture. This may have a significant impact on those facing a crisis pregnancy if they work in an occupation that is characterised by a long-hours culture.

Drew *et al.* (2003) highlight the quantitative evidence in the long-hours culture in Ireland in their surveys of employers and employees. High rates of extended working hours on a regular basis were shown in many organisations, particularly in professional status jobs. The following table summarises the findings from employers on the long-hours culture:

**Table 3.2 Organisations in which employees work longer than their standard hours (n and %)**

Employment type	Number of organisations	Percentage of organisations
Senior managers/professions	788	86%
Junior managers/professional/technician	560	61%
Other non-manual	273	30%
Manual	273	30%

Source: Drew *et al.* (2003). *Off The Treadmill*. National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies: Dublin.

It is interesting to note that there are significant differences between the extended working hours of senior professionals and non-manual and manual workers. This evidence suggests that workers are either required to, or perceive that they are required to, work longer hours in order to achieve career success. There are also significant variations between workers in these categories on whether or not they receive payment for working long hours. The following table summarises data collected by Drew *et al.* on whether employees who work long hours are remunerated either in payment or time off in lieu:

**Table 3.3 Availability of overtime or time off in lieu (n and %)**

Employment type	Overtime paid in organisations	Time off in lieu in organisations	Neither option in organisations
Senior managers/professions	53 (6%)	202 (24%)	592 (70%)
Junior managers/professional/technician	222 (30%)	255 (35%)	258 (35%)
Other non-manual	387 (66%)	132 (22%)	69 (12%)
Manual	442 (84%)	50 (10%)	33 (6%)

Source: Adapted from Drew *et al.* (2003). *Off The Treadmill*. National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies: Dublin.

This data shows that whereas the majority of senior managers do not receive remuneration in pay for extra time worked, the opposite is true for manual workers. This may be because of senior managers' (generally) substantial salary and benefits package, which may be seen by employers and employees alike as recompense for extended working hours. In relation to the issue of crisis pregnancy, senior personnel may have had to expend a significant amount of time and energy in order to achieve their position, and may not want to give it all up if faced with an unplanned or crisis pregnancy.

Case study evidence of long hours in different occupational sectors is given in the literature. For example, Bacik *et al.* (2003) researched the role of gender in the legal profession in Ireland. Questionnaires were mailed to 3,422 persons<sup>13</sup>, and the study is based on a total of 788 questionnaires returned, a response rate of 23%. Responses were received from 32 judges, 518 solicitors, 220 barristers and 18 others. In relation to working time, the questionnaire asked respondents to give an estimate of weekly working hours. On average, men worked 47.8 hours and women worked 43.1 hours.

The research found that the high incidence of long working hours is evident for both genders, indicating that it is an endemic feature of the legal profession. With the highest proportion (50%) of both men and women working over 40 hours a week, it is clear that long working hours are either perceived as necessary, or are required in the legal profession. The research respondents agreed for the need for change in the long

<sup>13</sup> Questionnaires were sent to solicitors, barristers, legal academics, members of the judiciary and lawyers in public service, both women and men.

working hours of those in the law profession. A total of 98 men (68%) and 315 women (80%) rated changes in working hours to enhance work-life balance as important (Bacik *et al.* 2003: 311). Some saw the workplace culture as something that is sustained by employees, particularly when they are self-employed and are afraid to turn down work:

*In private practice all solicitors are inclined to take on more work than they can deal with which clearly puts many under pressure ... this is partly because one is afraid that next year there will be no work. (2003: 238)*

Evidence of a long-hours culture is also presented in Seabury and Sinclair's report on An Post (2004). Qualitative interviews, in the form of perception groups and focus groups, were held with 17 managers and supervisors and 123 staff in order to assess awareness of, and attitudes towards, working conditions and work-life balance policies. Both managers and employees reported feeling under pressure to work longer hours than they were contracted for, but for many different reasons. For example, managers reported that they were expected to work long hours without any remuneration (2004: 60). Employees varied as to whether they objected to the long-hours culture or not, and some reported that they would prefer time off in lieu for extra hours rather than payment. The varied results of this survey indicate that employees at different levels experience workplace cultures very differently due to the expectations that arise with seniority in many organisations.

#### 3.4.2 *Communication in the workplace*

The report of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future emphasises the fact that high levels of consultation with employees about changes to workplace practices can produce positive reactions. Conversely, employees view the provision of information without meaningful consultation as a negative experience of their workplace culture (2005: 66). Further, it is found that where participatory practices and good organisational communication exist, employee satisfaction is increased, and employees are willing to embrace change (2005: 52). Therefore, a flexible environment breeds flexible employees, a definite benefit for both employers and employees.

The issue of information exchange is paramount in workplace cultures. Who is informed, and to what extent, is part of the networking system of an organisation, and thus determines how well individuals can perform and progress. On an informal level, the consultation between staff and management is also crucial to the development of relationships, which is a significant factor in successful career paths. Communication within the workplace is an aspect of workplace culture that is specifically highlighted in the literature as a crucial component to implementing successful work-life balance policies, as well as creating change more generally in the organisation. The Labour Relations Commission stresses the need for dialogue within a workplace between employers and employees:

*Workplaces can only respond effectively to the changing needs and preferences of workers if they are aware of such changing needs and preferences. Quite simply, therefore, employers must listen to employees. In our experience this does not always happen. Communication and consultation tend to be weak in many organisations and many employees have no opportunity to express their views and/or concerns and have them considered. (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 68).*

The need for a more participatory style of organisation structure, where employees are involved at all levels in the decision-making process, is one solution to achieve more positive workplace cultures. This will alter the nature and perception of organisational changes, from a situation where these are imposed from the top down, to an environment where employees are active agents in the process. Thus, whether seen from the macro- or micro-level perspective, it is clear that there is an emphasis on more participatory and democratic forms of management structure and organisation. This should be successful if widely implemented, given the statistical evidence of correlations between communication and participation and employee job satisfaction.

In relation to crisis pregnancy, if an employee is informed of changes within their organisation, it may affect their decision-making. For example, if they know that flexible working arrangements are to be brought in to the organisation, and they are included in the process of creating these changes, it may make them more inclined to continue with the pregnancy if they believe these arrangements will aid them to cope with parenthood and employment.

### *3.4.3 Employee experiences of work intensification and stress*

Duxbury, Higgins and Coghill (2002, in Work-life Balance Network 2004) undertook the most recent and comprehensive Canadian research on employee experiences of workplace culture. Their research involved a sample of 31,571 employees. The respondents worked in 100 companies, each employing over 500 people or more - 40 private sector enterprises, 22 public sector, and 38 not-for-profit organisations. The aim was to examine work-life balance issues, particularly stress experienced by employees, and to highlight why this should be a policy issue for stakeholders. They found that employees faced three main challenges in their working lives:

- organisational problems - e.g. heavy workloads, lack of management support, long-hours cultures, inequity in access to work-life balance policies, conflict between career progression and flexible working
- problems at the work-life balance interface - e.g. role overload, competing demands of work and home life on time and energy, stress of living arrangements, e.g. lone parenthood affecting work
- problems at the individual or family level - e.g. personal problems or crises that impact on work, pressure of childcare responsibilities, eldercare responsibilities, financial problems.

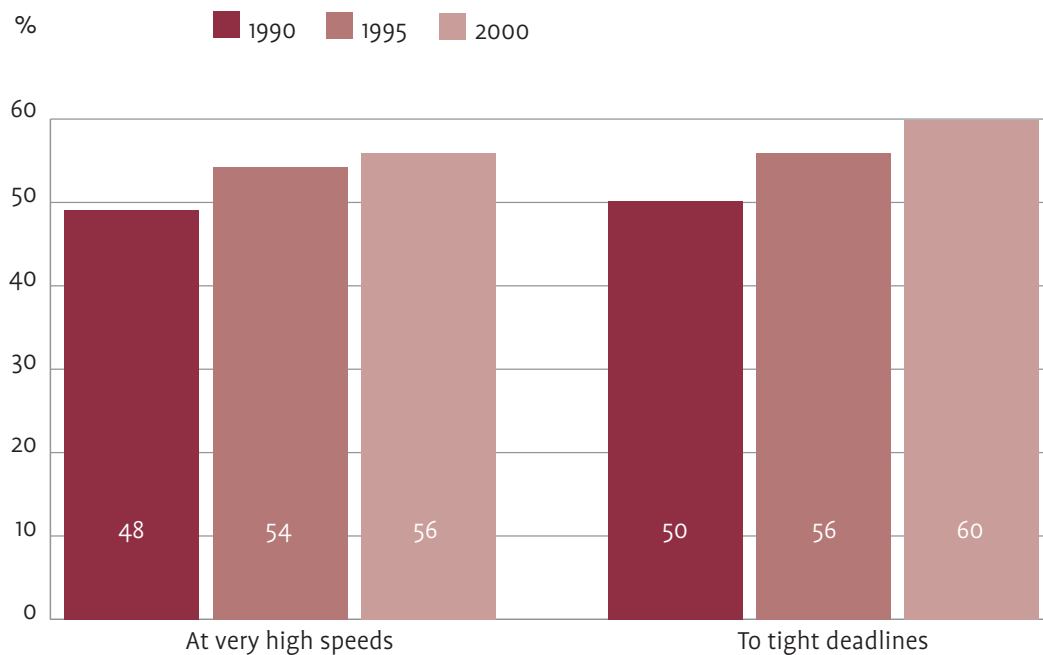
As would be expected, there were high levels of reported stress due to this range of factors. The study found that 50% of employees reported that work had a negative impact on their family life; 10% said work had a positive impact on their family life. The latter group gave reasons such as having older children, or none at all, having good family support, or working in an organisation (and having a direct manager) that supported their work-life balance needs. It can be seen, therefore, that workplace cultures can lead to experiences of stress by some employees, but they can also remedy this situation by developing environments more equipped to deal with stress and more supportive of workers' needs.

Evidence to support employees' reported feelings of increased demand is provided by the International Labour Organisation. Their Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM)

statistics<sup>14</sup> show that Irish workers have seen a reduction in their working hours from over 1,900 per year (per individual worker), to less than 1,700 hours per year. Ireland has experienced the largest decreases in working hours, in common with Belgium, France and Portugal. However, the reduction of hours has not resulted in correlative reduction in terms of productivity - in fact, the situation is the complete opposite. Examining productivity in terms of Gross Domestic Product per person employed,<sup>15</sup> Irish workers' GDP has risen from below \$30,000 in 1980 to over \$50,000 in 2002. This indicates that Ireland's workforce is producing more in fewer hours, and this increase has occurred steadily over the last two decades. It is clear, then, that there has been a general increase in work intensification for Irish workers that shows no signs of abating.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has charted trends within the European labour market over the last decade. Their report, *Quality of Work and Employment in Europe: Issues and Challenges* (2002), highlights the increasing intensification of people's working lives in terms of deadlines and expected outputs. The following table shows data for the 15 European countries in 2002. Data is taken from the Eurobarometer surveys conducted in all EU countries.

**Fig. 3.1 Employees working at very high speeds or to tight deadlines in the EU 15 (%)**



Source: The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2002), *Quality of Work and Employment in Europe: Issues and Challenges*. Available from <http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/files/EF0212EN.pdf>

From this data we can see that work intensification - in terms of performance pressure on employees - gradually but significantly increased between 1990 and 2000.

In Ireland, evidence of work intensification can be seen in the survey of employees by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (2003a). The authors outline a number

14 Information in this paragraph available from [www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/kilm/trends.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/kilm/trends.htm)  
 15 ILO calculations based on US\$ rate in 1990.

of factors relating to the workplace culture that can increase stress for employees, including extended hours, the intensity of work, and some forms of flexible working arrangements, such as those that involve working antisocial hours. Of those employees that reported feeling stressed at work:

- 7% of employees reported always feeling stressed
- 18% said they often did
- 47% said they sometimes did.

Measures of work pressure were also included in the study. In relation to working in a pressurised organisation:

- 51% either agreed or strongly agreed that they worked under a great deal of pressure
- 38% either agreed or strongly agreed that they did not have enough time to get everything done.

These results show that while a majority of employees think that they work hard, just over half felt under pressure about this, and although only 38% felt like they did not have enough time to do things, a higher amount of people worked extra hours. Job sharing was found to be a particularly stressful working arrangement in the NCPP study, a fact that the authors found to be anomalous: "Since fewer hours of work are found to reduce stress, and this is already controlled in the [statistical analysis] model, there is something else about this particular arrangement that increases stress" (2003a: 115). It seems likely that the 'something else' could be factors associated with the workplace culture; for example, lack of or insufficient communication systems, or inadequate training for job sharers. However, there are no nationally representative studies specifically on the experience of job sharers as yet, thus reasons for this stress can only be speculated upon.

### 3.5 Attitudes of employers and managers within the workplace culture

#### 3.5.1 Employers and structural organisational change

Resistance to change can be seen to be one of the most crucial aspects of workplace culture in relation to flexible working arrangements, despite positive benefits of work-life balance reported in national and international literature (see section 2.11 for potential benefits of these policies). Workplace culture has been identified as a key site of change, one that is essential to the continued growth and success of national economic policies and practices. Hofstede argues that one of the ways workplace cultures can change is by changing the structures of the workplace. He argues that you cannot wait for this change to occur 'naturally' if you want to radically improve the quality of people's lives:

*One of the most effective ways of changing mental programmes of individuals is changing behaviour first ... That value change has to precede behaviour change is an idealistic assumption which neglects the contribution of the **situation** to actual behaviour (1984: 23, emphasis in original).*

This argument correlates with the positive experiences reported by organisations that implement change, and offers hope that where work-life balance policies are embedded in the structure of an organisation, they will be successful in achieving their aims.

There are two key areas outlined in the literature where change can be realized: at the macro level, in the structure of organisations, and at the micro level, in the individual practices of management personnel. Whilst both are important to emphasise as loci of change, the literature stresses the crucial nature of management support in the success or failure of flexible working practices (see below). Pillinger states that her research on E.U. trends in flexible working has found that “those employers that invested in their staff, that had introduced more participatory styles of management were also those that offered the best quality of service and the best working conditions” (2001:7). Thus embedding work-life balance policies within the workplace cultural structure can achieve benefits for all. However, employers may have mixed views on the harmonisation of work and home life, and in the absence of statutory policies on all aspects of flexible working (i.e. on arrangements excluding parental leave) their attitude will often determine the ethos of the organisation. Woodland, Simmonds, Thornby, Fitzgerald and McGee (2003) highlight the mixed responses of UK employers in the *Second Work-Life Balance Survey*. The authors found that while 29% of employers considered that they bore no responsibility towards helping people to balance their work and other aspects of their lives, 74% of employers agreed that people who work flexibly are just as likely to be promoted as those that do not. This indicates that while some do not wish to engage with work-life balance policies in their workplace, they do not actually view them as negative policies in terms of career progression, contrary to many employees' fears (see section 3.6.2).

On a positive note, there is evidence of organisational change geared towards improving the workplace culture in relation to work-life balance within Ireland. A recent report in *The Sunday Times* outlined work-life balance policies in two major corporations in Ireland<sup>16</sup>. In the drinks company, Diageo, employees have the use of a scheme whereby they can buy up to six extra days off a year. In the telecommunications company O2, staff can avail of flexible working arrangements, and they also have a pilot scheme in the summer for working parents to take extra time off while their children are on holidays. In O2, there are also senior management personnel working reduced hours, an arrangement rarely reported in surveys of employees. Whilst these arrangements are not common, it is a positive sign that work-life balance is incorporated to such an extent in the workplace culture of a few major corporations in Ireland.

### 3.5.2 Management training and styles

The structure and style of management is one of the lynchpins of any business, whether in the public or private sector. It is one of the key areas where change is needed identified in the report by the Forum on the Workplace of the Future, and a shift to a greater focus on performance management styles is advocated for all organisations (2005: 11). The difference is managerial appraisal of *outputs* rather than *inputs*; management practices that assess employee achievement rather than time spent in the office. The Work-life Balance Network comments on this issue: “Both research and anecdotal evidence suggests that it is an employee’s immediate manager who makes all the difference as to whether or not that employee avails of flexible work options” (2004: 7). The literature also highlights the fact that current management styles can be strongly resistant to change. As the OECD comments: “Leadership is particularly necessary to

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<sup>16</sup> Work smart, not long, to keep everyone happy' by Barbara McCarthy in *The Sunday Times*, April 24th 2005.

overcome internal institutional barriers (in large firms) to introducing such [WLB] measures" (2003: 88-89).

Managers are also targeted as integral to the process of workplace cultural change in the Canadian research undertaken by Duxbury, Higgins and Coghill (2002 cited in Work-life Balance Network, 2004). The authors recommend developing a supportive workplace culture, mainly by focusing on improvements in people management. They assert that:

*If an organisation wishes to improve Work-life Balance it needs to look at its performance measures and ensure it focuses on objectives, results and output. It needs to publicly reward people who have successfully combined work and non-work domains and not promote those who work long hours and expect others to do so.*

(In Work-life Balance Network 2004: 11.)

This latter point is imperative when considering the role of senior management within the workplace culture. Senior personnel in the study often worked long hours and rarely availed of flexible working arrangements. However, their behaviour sets the tone for the organisation and thus must be changed in order to promote work-life balance policies: "Senior management needs to model appropriate behaviour in order to encourage employees to use the policies" (*Ibid.*). This will dissuade those who believe that work-life balance working arrangements are incompatible with successful career promotion.

In an Irish context, Drew *et al.* (2003) outline the importance of developments in human resource management over the last number of years. Workplaces that perceive a benefit from being viewed as an employer of choice are also interested in utilising best practice models of management, which are increasingly being identified as those that attend to the needs of the employees. However, management styles are identified as unsupportive of work-life balance policies by some employees in Drew *et al.*'s study. In response to the statement 'The predominant management style reflects respect for work-life balance', less than half of the respondents agreed that this was the case (2003: 102).

Modifications, and in some cases, transformations, in the style and exercise of management within an organisation are necessary in order to successfully implement, sustain and assess changes in the working practices of employees. Personnel managers, as the connecting link between the executive and the employees, are the locus of much attention within the literature as key players in effecting change (Fitzpatrick 2005, Work-life Balance Network 2004, Powell and Mainiero 1999, Barham, Gottlieb and Kelloway 1998).

However, the literature also identifies the difficulties for employers and managers in implementing flexible working policies. Drew *et al.* (2003) outline the recent trend in organisations for the devolution of responsibility for implementing and managing human resource policies to the line managers. Flexible working is one such policy, but line managers may struggle if they have no training, knowledge or particular expertise in implementing such human resource strategies. This will be compounded if they have not been personally convinced of the benefits of flexible working, and also if such options are not available to them (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development 2002a, Kodz, Harper and Dench 2002, Woodland *et al.* 2003). Managers will also face practical difficulties in knowing how to manage and assess the work of employees that they either cannot see - because they are in a different location - or, are not present with for the

whole of their shift. This, again, will require an emphasis on production assessment, but it will also require radical shifts in communication between managers and employees, as well as a shift in their personal relationship.

### 3.6 Attitudes of employees within the workplace culture

#### 3.6.1 Attitudes of colleagues

Cross-national data reveals consistencies and disparities between workplace cultures across countries. Attitudinal responses of workers with children were obtained in the study by Fine-Davis *et al.* (2004). The perceived acceptability of attending to childcare needs within working hours across the four countries in the study are summarised in the table below:

**Table 3.4 Perceived acceptability by colleagues of respondent arriving late to/leaving early from work due to childcare problems - mean scores by country and socio-economic status (n=400)**

Socio-economic status (SES)	France	Italy	Denmark	Ireland	Total
Low SES	4.4	4.3	4.9	4.6	4.6
High SES	4.8	4.9	5.3	5.0	5.0
Total	4.6	4.6	5.1	4.8	4.8

(1 = very unacceptable, 6 = very acceptable)

Source: Table 9.10 in Fine-Davis *et al.* (2004: 147) *Fathers and Mothers: Dilemmas of the Work-Life Balance*. Kluwer Academic Publishers: Dordrecht.

As can be seen from this data, the attitude of the Irish respondents did not differ vastly from their counterparts in the other countries, which suggests that broadly similar views exist on the acceptability of taking time from employment to respond to the dilemmas posed by using childcare services. It is important to note that there are also consistent differences between socio-economic groups in the marketplace, with those in the higher group showing greater understanding in terms of workplace flexibility from their colleagues than those in the lower group. This is a troubling finding, given that (as mentioned previously) those in lower status occupations may also have to cope with less choice in childcare provision due to lower wages and flexible working practices that include working unsocial hours. (See section 2.10.1 and Tables 2.7 and 2.8 for research on socio-economic status and work-life balance arrangements.)

Drew *et al.* (2003) examined attitudes in Ireland towards colleagues who had availed of work-life balance arrangements. Of their research sample, a total of 638 (68%) had worked with someone who had availed of flexible working arrangements, with more women reporting this (78%) than men (61%). Advantages and positive benefits were identified by colleagues from this experience. These ranged from the benefits of working with happier staff members who were not experiencing stress, to gaining experience whilst they covered for their colleagues, and enhanced positive experience of the working environment (Drew *et al.* 2003: 95). Disadvantages were identified as having to cover extra work if no cover was provided, and adjusting to new staff members who replace those gone. They also saw specific disadvantages for the colleagues availing of

the leave, including missed training opportunities and the loss of promotion opportunities (*Ibid.*).

### 3.6.2 *Attitudes towards career progression*

Fear that availing of flexible working will hamper career progression is also reported in international literature (Kodz *et al.* 2002 *inter alia*). Flexexecutive, a consultancy agency specialising in flexible working solutions for Human Resources (HR), marketing and IT in the UK, conducted a study on the former two professional groups (2002, in Work-life Balance Network 2004). A total of 404 research respondents were included in the study: 151 in Marketing (78% female, 22% male) and 253 in HR (83% female, 17% male). Thus the research sample was made up of a much larger proportion of females than males. The findings show a high demand for flexible working policies from professionals currently working long hours. One of the most interesting aspects of this study is that 68% of the marketing employees and 53% of the HR employees did not have children. They reported a desire to have more time in order to improve health and fitness and reduce travelling times to work (Work-life Balance Network 2004: 14). This is important as it indicates some of the needs of those employees who do not have children, and is particularly interesting given that most of the respondents were women<sup>17</sup>. These respondents see time for oneself, away from the pressures of work, as necessary and desirable. Such time is also imperative to have for the workforce in general so that it can sustain itself and continue to produce.

The *Second Work-Life Balance Study* in the U.K. exemplified the belief that availing of flexible working policies had a negative effect on one's career. There were relatively high proportions of employees who felt that the following would have a negative impact on their career: not being able to work beyond their contracted hours (i.e. leaving on time - 42%); taking leave to look after their children or another dependent (37%); working different work patterns (32%), or working from home (25%). In most cases, men were more likely to consider flexible working practices to have a damaging effect on their career. Working reduced hours was viewed by 56% of men, as compared to 45% of women, as being detrimental to career progression, as was leaving on time, identified by 46% of men, as compared to 37% of women. There is a need for more research on management staff that avail of work-life balance policies, such as flexitime or job sharing, in order to assess their career success and/or progression in light of their working practices.

It is interesting to note that national and international research shows that those who avail of part-time working arrangements "are no less committed to either employment or to their employing organisations than full-time workers, which contradicts those who conflate hours of work and commitment" (NCPP 2003b: 32). Evidence from the literature also suggests that workers availing of flexible working options, including reduced hours, are often just as productive as their full-time colleagues (Bunting 2004). The perception of the acceptability of flexible and part-time working arrangements within the wider workplace culture, therefore, is crucial to the success of these policies and beneficial to those who avail of them.

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<sup>17</sup> The age ranges of the research sample are not given, which precludes an analysis of whether or not men and women in this study have foregone the opportunity to have children for the sake of their career, or alternatively, whether they have not yet reached the general age at which childrearing normally occurs.

### 3.6.3 *Gender differences in the workplace culture*

There is a clear gender dimension to the issue of workplace culture (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2004, Fine-Davis *et al.* 2004, NCPP 2003b, Flanagan and Lyons 1999). Workplace cultures have been shown in the literature to often espouse traditional notions of career paths (i.e. long-hours cultures) and gender roles within organisations (i.e. making flexible working arrangements more easily available to female rather than male workers). The International Labour Organisation (2005) highlights three inter-related indicators of current gender inequalities that can be seen to be determined to a large extent by traditional workplace cultures:

- the 'glass ceiling' - i.e. the lack of women in management positions
- the gender pay gap - i.e. the unaccountable differential between male and female rates of pay
- the 'sticky floor' - i.e. the concentration of women in the lowest paid jobs.

These are useful terms in which to consider the underlying - and often hidden - power structures of workplace cultures that subordinate women. These power structures inform the ethos of an organisation. Workplace cultures can be resistant to change; they can also evade changes attempted through legislation, which explains the persistent inequalities in the workforce, particularly in relation to women.

Humphreys, Drew and Murphy's (1999) study on gender equality in the Irish civil service at the higher grades highlighted some key factors about workplace culture. They found that whilst there is an official commitment to equal opportunities in the state sector, the reality was that there were economic, status and work-life balance issues that affected men and women very differently. In relation to the difficulties faced by women, they stated that women "are far more likely to have to balance caring responsibilities outside work with a long-hours culture within the service itself, often choosing job-sharing or ruling out promotion as a result. They are less likely than men to be placed in high-profile, core activities within the service" (1999:xi).

Thus it can be seen that workplace culture often undermines official workplace equality policies. There is a gendered dimension to workplace culture and the potential results of a negative workplace culture for women can be measured through financial and status losses they have incurred throughout their employment.

Bunting estimates that in the U.K., as a result of the gender pay gap, the penalty women pay in terms of lost opportunities due to caring responsibilities can be up to £140,000 in lifetime earnings (2004: 247). However, the specific negative impacts of current workplace cultures on women go beyond financial remuneration. The lack of opportunities for women in the senior grades of organisations means that they receive less training, have less discretion over their work, will receive less information in the workplace and will have high levels of work stress (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 61). These are all factors that have been shown to decrease worker satisfaction, and may lead to temporary or permanent withdrawal from the labour market (Crisis Pregnancy Agency 2004a). The long-hours culture in many workplaces can lead women to have to make choices within a limited framework, leaving them just three viable options:

- to prioritise career commitments over family responsibilities

- to seek reconciliation between work and family to achieve a greater balance between the two
- to withdraw from the labour market completely while their child(ren) need full-time care (OECD 2003: 90).

The lack of choice in combining work and family life will affect all women, and will almost certainly have an impact on those facing a crisis pregnancy.

These limited choices may be due in part to the absence of a critical mass of women in influential positions in organisations. In terms of management and senior positions, according to the Organisation for Economic Development, women make up close to 30% of those in senior managerial positions in Ireland, which is comparative to Austria, and well above Japan, in which women comprise only 9% of these positions (2003: 2). However, this is still a minority, and the absence of women in authoritative positions may mean that they will have less impact on workplace policies that shape an organisation's workplace culture, which may perpetuate women's feelings of dissatisfaction if they are not represented at this level. The lack of women in senior positions is also a "serious under-utilisation of women's high standards of education and skills" (*Ibid.*: 62). Thus, from an economic perspective, women's array of employment expertise is an under-exploited resource that it would surely benefit organisations to develop.

### 3.7 Implications of workplace culture for parents

The Equal Opportunities Commission in the U.K. recently undertook a study of 1,200 people on the issue of pregnancy and the workplace. The study showed that many women still face problems in the workplace once they become pregnant. Respondents reported a range of problematic situations including:

- dismissal
- lack of promotion
- change of salary terms
- unfounded criticism
- non-payment of bonuses
- change of hours
- disciplinary action about performance (Equal Opportunities Commission 2005).

Among the key statistical findings of the research were that:

- 84% disagreed with the statement that if a woman becomes pregnant it shows she is less dedicated to her career compared with a woman who chooses not to have children
- 21% knew someone who had experienced problems at work because of their pregnancy. This proportion rose to 33% among women aged 25-34
- 75% disagreed that an employer could refuse a woman a job if they knew she was pregnant.

The research found that while there was a high level of awareness of maternity rights, simultaneously there were widespread instances of discrimination, which shows a blatant flouting of the law by some employers and managers.

Research of this kind does not currently exist in Ireland. However, there is some

indication of similar experiences of pregnant women in the cases taken to the Labour Court on grounds of discrimination. The Equality Tribunal<sup>18</sup> dealt with two cases of pregnancy-based discrimination in 2004, only one of which was successful. Also in 2004, the Labour Court found in favour of two pregnant women who claimed discrimination and awarded amounts of €18,000 and €7,000 respectively. This was a reduction in the number of cases from 2003, when a total of six complaints reached the Labour Court. Of these six, four of the claimant women were successful, receiving awards of between €4,000 and €25,000. Complainants were working in a range of industries, including hairdressing, childcare and manufacturing, indicating that this situation is not confined to any particular industry or organisation type. The substantial awards were made by the Labour Court in recognition not just of the loss of earnings the complainants suffered, but in some cases, it was stated that “the award should not just be compensatory, but should be appropriate to the wrong suffered and have a real dissuasive effect” (Determination No. EED316).

Russell, Smyth, Lyons and O’Connell (2002) conducted a study on Irish women’s experiences of returning to employment, training and education after leaving the labour market for some time, generally due to caring responsibilities. Respondents reported a range of experiences, including differing levels of desire to return to work in the context of the difficulties it posed for childcare arrangements and the barriers they faced in career progression. Some respondents reported being treated negatively by their colleagues once they had children:

*... I was treated as a completely different person to the person I'd been before I'd had the child. Immediately I wasn't in line for any type of career progression ... therefore you kind of think - is it worth putting all that effort in? Because I'm not going to get any further... (Russell et al. 2002: 51)*

This points to the fact that women can easily lose confidence if they experience negative workplace environments. This may be responsible for them leaving the labour market if their caring responsibilities are not recognised and/or valued.

Workplace culture is also a significant factor in whether or not a working parent will choose to access programmes that are designed to harmonise work and family life. The highly gendered nature of the take-up of parental leave is highlighted by ICTU, who state that since the introduction of parental leave in Ireland, only 20% of eligible workers have used it, 84% of whom were women (ICTU 2004: 26). Cross-national research by the OECD (2003) highlights the fact that workplace cultures in Ireland, Japan and Austria are similarly bound by traditional gender-role norms in relation to the take-up of flexible working policies and parental leave arrangements. Women avail of most flexible arrangements in all three countries. The following table illustrates the gender differential in take-up rates of parental leave:

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18 The Equality Tribunal received jurisdiction in 2004 to investigate and decide complaints of discrimination in the first instance referred to it under the Employment Equality Acts, the Equal Status Acts and the Pensions Acts. Appeals can be heard by the Labour Court.

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**Table 3.5 Take-up rates of parental leave by gender (%)**

Country	Female take-up rate	Male take-up rate
Austria	9%	2%
Ireland	40%	5%
Japan	58%	0.5%

Source: Taken from OECD (2003). *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*, Austria, Ireland and Japan. OECD: Paris, page 21.

While financial constraints may be one reason for this, the most common reason cited by fathers for not taking up these arrangements was due to the non-accommodating atmosphere in the workplace (*Ibid.*).

Fine-Davis *et al.*'s (2004) study also supports findings on the importance of attitudes within the workplace in determining whether flexible working arrangements are availed of and, if so, how people availing of them feel their working arrangements are viewed by others. The participants in the study felt that it was most important to feel that "one's colleagues accepted one's childcare responsibilities. Accepting attitudes on the part of managers also helped a great deal and were significantly related to ease in combining work and family" (Fine-Davis 2005: 13). Irish participants, in common with the French respondents in the study, tended to express feelings of pressure around taking parental leave entitlements and availing of family friendly policies at work (Fine-Davis *et al.* 2004: 235). In comparison with the other countries, in Ireland there was a higher proportion of negative attitudes and perceptions towards people participating in flexible working arrangements, particularly towards men (*Ibid.*: 14). This would appear contradictory, given that 82% of Irish fathers and 62% of mothers said they would like to spend more time with their families. This paradox is indicative of the complexities of workplace culture, as it shows that even those who may wish for change at a personal level still espouse traditional notions of workplace cultural assumptions (*Ibid.*). This factor is important in relation to those facing an unplanned or a crisis pregnancy, as if they work in such an environment they may not view flexible working arrangements as 'real' or viable solutions to combining a career trajectory and a family.

### 3.8 Summary of chapter three

- Legislation on workplace culture can only cover direct discrimination against employees within their organisation. As yet, there is no legislation that can combat trends or attitudes within organisations such as the long-hours culture or pressure.
- In the E.U. the Working Time Regulations have set a maximum working week of 48 hours for all workers (with exceptions on fluctuations in working time for some professions). Only the U.K. has an opt-out clause for these regulations.
- Irish people are now working the longest hours in the European Union, with males having higher total number of hours than females, although this is based on averages of working hours across all sectors and working arrangements.

- Senior personnel are more likely to work longer hours, although they are generally rewarded with time off. Non-manual workers have differing experiences of remuneration for extra time worked - some are paid, some get time off in lieu, while others are not compensated at all.
- There are expectations of long hours at certain levels of seniority, and in certain professions. For example, in the legal profession, most employees are working over the statutory maximum of time per week, as are senior personnel in An Post.
- Long-hours cultures are detrimental to work-life balance. If an individual facing a crisis pregnancy is working in a long-hours culture they may not wish to continue with the pregnancy if they cannot combine it with their career.
- High levels of consultation with employees about changes to workplace practices can produce positive reactions to such changes. Insufficient communication within the workplace can lead employees to have a negative experience of their workplace culture. Information exchange could also be vital to those making a decision about a crisis pregnancy.
- Employees are working fewer hours than previously, but are experiencing a greater intensification of their work. Feelings of pressure and stress are now quite common across all sectors.
- Although workplace cultures are often the cause of stress, a positive and supportive workplace culture can help employees deal with stress.
- Employers are often reluctant to alter the structure of their organisations in order to address work-life balance policies, as they may either not see the benefits or be unwilling to make the changes due to perceived administrative costs or disruption.
- Managers are key personnel in the implementation and supervision of flexible working arrangements. Their position is interesting because they are often not permitted to avail of these working arrangements themselves.
- New management styles and practices are needed within organisations in order to manage performance rather than presence in workplace cultures. Managers are also having to deal with managing workers who are not present at the same time or even in the same place as them, and clearly there is a need for more training and support for them to do this successfully.
- Employees are experiencing difficulty when accessing flexible working arrangements due to a range of factors, including the fact that their work often has to be covered by colleagues when they are away, and the perception that such work practices are detrimental to career progression. This may be a particular issue of concern for those facing a crisis pregnancy who wish to continue with their career plans.
- Women generally avail of flexible working arrangements more than men, therefore they will experience both the positive and negative aspects of workplace cultures in relation to work-life balance policies. Workplace cultures have been shown in the literature to often espouse traditional notions of career paths and gender roles within organisations, both of which often disadvantage women if they choose flexible working options. This may be considered by an individual facing a crisis pregnancy as a reason not to continue with the pregnancy.

- Women have also faced specific discrimination within workplaces due to pregnancy, and many have been successful in seeking redress through the Labour Court.
- Workplace culture is also a significant factor in whether or not a working parent will choose to access programmes that are designed to harmonise work and family life. Research by the OECD (2003) highlights the fact that workplace cultures in Ireland, Japan and Austria are similarly bound by traditional gender role norms in relation to the take-up of flexible working policies and parental leave arrangements. Women avail of most flexible arrangements in all three countries.
- Irish parents, in common with the French respondents, in a 2004 study (Fine-Davis et al. 2004) tended to express feelings of pressure around taking parental leave entitlements and availing of family friendly policies at work (2004: 235).
- In comparison with the other countries, in Ireland there was a higher proportion of negative attitudes and perceptions towards people participating in flexible working arrangements, particularly towards men (Fine-Davis et al. 2004). This is important in considering those facing a crisis pregnancy, as if they work in such an environment, they may not view flexible working arrangements as 'real' or viable solutions to combining a career trajectory and a family.

### 3.9 Conclusions

The research suggests that the culture and ethos of a workplace, i.e. if it is felt to be flexible and accommodating, can have significantly beneficial effects on workers' happiness and health. Workplace culture will affect those facing a crisis pregnancy in a number of ways. The paths to potential career progression will be clearly mapped out, and if these routes are seen as incompatible with childcare responsibilities and needs, it may affect the decision to continue with the pregnancy, or the decision to remain in employment if the pregnancy is continued with. Levels of support for working parents in the workplace, for example the availability of flexible working policies and the provision of direct or indirect childcare facilities/supports, may be determining factors for those facing a crisis pregnancy.

Evidence of a long-hours culture in Ireland and other industrialised economies is widespread in the literature. The pressure to be present for longer than contracted hours is particularly felt by those with caring responsibilities. This is what Fitzpatrick calls 'the sandwich generation', meaning people (particularly women) who have simultaneous care responsibilities for children and for older people (2005: 22). These dual caring responsibilities were also reported by the respondents in the study by Coveney, Murphy-Lawless and Sheridan (1998). Russell *et al.* also examined the difficulties women experienced in negotiating the expectations of the 'long-hours culture' with their caring responsibilities. One respondent reported the scrutiny she received for leaving work on time to look after her child: "Suddenly I was leaving at 5.00 and everybody else is turning around and staring... my whole career plan was out of the window. I was not taken seriously once I had my children" (2002: 51). Clearly, when workers must struggle to justify leaving on time, there is a need for change in the long-hours culture of current workplaces. If those facing a crisis pregnancy perceive that they

will also be treated differently in their workplace if they proceed with the pregnancy, it may influence them not to do so.

Workplace culture will also be a factor in determining the incidence and extent of flexible working arrangements in any organisation. This may be one of the main causes for such arrangements to be more widespread in the public sector, which as a workplace culture is more directly influenced by legislative and policy commitments to equality and fairness. In addition, the organisational culture can also determine whether or not flexible working arrangements are availed of where they do exist. Workplace environments create a cyclical process in this respect - they will significantly shape attitudes towards those accessing work-life balance arrangements, which will in turn affect take-up rates, which will in turn affect attitudes which will change as the arrangements become more common. This is important in relation to those facing a crisis pregnancy. Work-life balance policies must be upheld and promoted in organisations where they exist in order for those individuals who are facing a crisis pregnancy to feel that they are a realisable option for them if they want to keep their child.

Workplace culture is thus the key to understanding workplace behaviour, particularly in accessing flexible working schemes. Legislation and formal policy alone are not enough to determine the successful implementation of work-life balance policies in the workplace. In this regard, it can be seen that management personnel are crucial - they embody the ethos of the workplace, and can be either instrumental or unsupportive in implementing and promoting work-life balance. Evidence from the literature suggests that they must be trained and supported in order to effectively implement, promote and assess work-life balance policies.

Workplace cultural change will require sustained, committed effort from all stakeholders. As Hofstede argues, "culture patterns are rooted in value systems of major groups of the population and ... they are stabilised over long periods of history" (1984: 13). They will, therefore, take a considerable amount of time to radically alter.

## 4.0. Literature and findings on maternity and childcare issues

### 4.1 Introduction

Childcare and maternity issues are at the forefront of current social debate in Ireland. As seen in Chapter 2, work-life balance policies are needed by those with children, in particular to incorporate childcare needs (see sections 2.2 and 2.5). In Chapter 3, the literature showed that the workplace culture will determine attitudes towards those with children, and whether or not parents feel comfortable accessing flexible arrangements that help them meet their childcare needs (see section 3.6). These issues will be important to those facing a crisis pregnancy as they are assessing their options. Thus maternity and childcare issues are embedded within the overall theme of work-life balance policies and will be further explored within this chapter.

Debates on the provision of childcare range from access, affordability, and choice to best practice models, with an increasing awareness of the importance of making early years childcare an educative environment that will prepare a child for life. The provision of childcare can be viewed as a remedy or a positive initiative for three different reasons: first, it would enhance gender balance in the workplace by relieving women of the burden of childcare; second, it would provide educationally beneficial circumstances for the development of the child through educative care; and third, it would relieve the pressure on working parents by providing facilities that match their employment responsibilities.

It has been argued widely that efficient and stimulating educative care at pre-school level is of benefit to all children. This is in addition to the benefits it provides parents in participating in the workforce and/or achieving a greater work-life balance. However, others argue that childcare must be carefully planned and used in balance with parental/primary care in order to avoid negative consequences, particularly emotional difficulties, for the children. The development of guidelines for health and safety have also been considered, and improvements have been made in this area through the development of the National Children's Strategy, and the monies made available through the National Development Plan.

There are significant gender issues in relation to childcare. Globally, women spend twice as much - or more - time as men on unpaid work, including domestic duties and childcare (ILO 2005). This work is critical to the world's economies, but as yet "Macro-economic indicators continue to ignore the "care economy" as fundamental to economic outcomes" (*Ibid.*). Bakker extends this argument by highlighting the value of reproduction and care work in achieving economic outcomes: "Markets operate without recognising that the unpaid work of reproduction and maintenance of human resources contributes to the realisation of formal market relations" (1994: 5). Bakker also sees labour markets as being prohibitive to women "given the lack of adequate childcare and the type of work available for those who have the task of childcare" (1994: 6).

Maternity and childcare issues most obviously affect parents, but they are themselves shaped by the wider policies of work-life balance and workplace culture. It can be seen from the literature that both the structural and environmental policies and practices of an organisation can determine the childcare choices of parents. The

decision to work flexibly to accommodate childcare responsibilities is made in response to the option to do so within the organisation, i.e. the structures must be there. However, the decision not to partake in the long-hours culture due to childcare responsibilities is a decision made in relation to the individual workplace culture, and this may be easy or difficult depending on the company ethos. Legislative measures to aid parents in their childcare responsibilities are also subject to negotiation within the particular workplace environment. For example, there is evidence to suggest organisational pressure on employees in certain companies not to take their full holiday leave, thus making it difficult for those wishing to maximise their time with their children to an even greater extent (see section 3.4.3).

The provision of childcare facilities and flexible working policies that take account of caring responsibilities are the particular focus of policy makers and also in recent times the media. They will also be factors that influence the decision-making process of an individual facing a crisis pregnancy. As mentioned previously (see Chapter 2), maternity rights in relation to employment have been extended and further protected, while paternal rights have not yet been addressed. This is a situation that many feel exacerbates current imbalances in the working and personal lives of men and women today. There are also significant gender dimensions to caring, and specifically childcare. For example, both the international and national literature shows that more women than men alter their working arrangements after the birth of a child, and having children will often limit women in applying for promotion.

#### **4.2 Impacts on those facing a crisis pregnancy**

Access to affordable, quality childcare will be of paramount importance to those who are facing a crisis pregnancy, particularly if they are in education and/or employment. Similar to other parents, reliance on family members - usually mothers - for support in meeting childcare needs could be expected to be high for those facing an unplanned reproductive choice. For those who perceive their pregnancy as a crisis, whether or not familial support is available may be an influential factor in their decisions about the pregnancy. In the case of a crisis pregnancy, this is not a certain outcome, and indeed it has been shown that fears of negative reactions to crisis pregnancy and lack of support have been motivators for termination (Mahon *et al.* 1998, McCashin 1996, Byrne 1992, Darling 1984). Choice is also an important factor to consider, as if there is a lack of family support, and professional childcare is the only option, it may be considered by some as a reason not to continue with the pregnancy. Evidence of this comes from a respondent in Mahon *et al.*'s study: "... I wouldn't want my kid in a crèche all day and see it like 3 hours a day. I didn't want that" (1998:298).

Childcare issues are of particular concern for lone mothers (McCashin 1996, Crisis Pregnancy Agency 2004a), and will therefore be of significance to those facing lone parenthood as a result of an unplanned pregnancy. This is due to a large degree to their financial constraints, which prohibit access to many professional childcare services, even if they are working. As one respondent in the study by Russell *et al.* commented: "If you're on minimum-wage job, you can't afford to buy decent childcare and that's just the bottom line, that's the economic reality" (2002: 69). This is one of the key issues for lone parents - the poverty trap of employment not being financially worthwhile due to childcare and associated costs, in comparison with welfare

entitlements, which are revoked if they earn too much. On the other hand, without access to independent financial means, women parenting alone will invariably find themselves at risk of poverty (Byrne 1992: 53). If lone parenthood is a potential outcome of continuing with a crisis pregnancy, it may influence the decision to continue with the pregnancy or not, or else to keep the child if the pregnancy is continued. Even if the decision was made to keep the child, and both parents were involved, lack of access to adequate and suitable childcare would still be a problem if they wanted to work outside the home.

However, the potential availability of childcare supports may have an important impact on the decision to go through with a crisis pregnancy or not, as it will be strongly related to perceptions of being able to cope with an unexpected child. In terms of family help with childcare, particularly from their mothers, there is evidence to suggest that tensions may exist in negotiating this care, as it cannot be presumed that all mothers, or potential mothers, will have supportive grandparents (McCashin 1996, O'Connor 1999, Murphy-Lawless *et al.* 2004). However, it is found that parental (and mostly maternal) support with childcare is common, particularly while the child is too young to attend crèches or childcare centres (Crisis Pregnancy Agency 2004a, Russell *et al.* 2002). An important issue in inter-family childcare support is the fact that older women's opportunities may be impeded by caring responsibilities for their grandchildren (Russell *et al.* 2002), a situation which perpetuates older women's poverty and lesser quality of life. This is recognised by many working parents, (Crisis Pregnancy Agency 2004a) but it is seen in some ways as inevitable due to lack of adequate childcare services and financial constraints.

### **4.3 Legislative context -international and national**

#### *4.3.1 International legislative context*

The United Nations held a convention on the rights of the child in 1989, at which forty-one individual rights were declared for all children, from birth to age eighteen years. Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992. The development of a rights-based framework for considering both the protection and needs of children has informed policy on children in Ireland in recent years.

Ireland has agreed to uphold these rights and to comply with recommendations from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors each signatory country. Whilst this is not legislation, it can be seen in the National Children's Strategy (2000) that Ireland has attempted to develop these rights into its legislation, regulations, and policies, particularly in relation to promoting children's opinions in decisions made about them. The government also created the office of Ombudsman for Children in 2002 to protect and promote children's rights.

The European Union has also influenced legislation on maternity and childcare in Ireland through its directives, in this case most particularly through the Maternity Directive and the Council Recommendation on Childcare, both of 1992. The latter recommendation on childcare stated that Member States should try to ensure that:

- services are affordable
- services combine safe and secure care with a broad education or pedagogical approach

- the needs of parents and children are taken into account in determining access to services
- services are available in all areas and regions, whether urban or rural
- services are accessible to children with special needs and to children in single-parent families.

In 2002 the European Council meeting in Barcelona concluded that Member States should aim to provide childcare to at least 90% of children between 3 years and mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age by 2010 (*Presidency Conclusions, SN100/1/02 REV 1: 12*). While these directives cannot directly alter policy or legislation in Ireland, or in any other European country, they are most certainly influential in informing legislation and policy in all member states through the promotion of ideal social policy.

#### 4.3.2 *National legislative context*

Although it is a statutory entitlement, the nature of parental leave requires negotiation with an employer to a greater degree than other types of leave, e.g. maternity leave and annual leave. This is particularly difficult for many fathers who may feel greater pressure due to the workplace culture (see section 3.7 for further discussion).

Similar to many countries, there are no statutory entitlements to childcare in Ireland, and legislation concerning childcare focuses on the regulation of childcare facilities. This has come through the Child Care Act, 1991, and the Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations (1996) and Amendment (1997). These govern health and safety standards for childcare facilities, as well as regulations on adult to child responsibility ratios. For example, the regulations stipulate that there must be a staffing ratio of 1 adult for 10 children in sessional services for children under 6 years, and an adult child ratio of 1:3 for children under 1 year in full day care services (Amendment 1997: Article 7). These regulations are often not applicable to childminding in private homes, and in this context, are hard to enforce. The Pre-School Services Regulations specify that when a childminder cares for more than three children under the age of six years in his/her home they should notify the local Health Board and become subject to certain regulations. However, this cannot be controlled as it is up to the childminder themselves to alert the authorities, and nothing can be done if they do not do this. Therefore, given that this type of childcare is currently unregulated economically, professionally and legislatively, it cannot be advocated as an ideal form of childcare provision, despite its attractions for some parents.

The regulation of childcare workers is also covered by the acts, and it was announced by the Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Children in September 2004 that there will be an extension of Garda vetting services for all those working with children and vulnerable adults (Childminding Ireland 2004a: 32). As yet, there are no statutory regulations for the care of children over six. Parents of this age group of children still need childcare if they are working outside the home, unless they have access to flexible working conditions that allow them to finish work in time to pick up their children from school. Thus national legislation currently neglects the childcare needs of a vast cohort of parents. Improvement in this situation is likely to come through policy initiatives and governmental funding (as recommended by the Working

Group of the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee 2005: 91) rather than legislation.

#### 4.4 Policy and policy-based initiatives on maternity and childcare issues

##### 4.4.1 Policy history

Maternity and childcare issues have been the subject of much research in recent times. There seems to be a continual debate over whether the state should be more involved in provision of childcare, or if this should remain a “private” concern. The situation is made more complex by the lack of any international consensus on the issue. Responses from governments vary widely, from the provision of tax reductions for childcare payments in Spain, to the state supported childcare initiatives in Scandinavia (Fine-Davis *et al.* 2004).

The OECD (2003) argues that the childcare system in Ireland is much like the American model, with a diverse range of services available, financed almost solely by parents in the absence of comprehensive public funding. The major difference is that the American market has large-scale commercial providers of a range of childcare facilities, which Ireland does not. Changes (as outlined below in section 4.4.2) are being implemented, but it is yet to be seen how effective these will be in providing real choice to parents in the childcare market, particularly low income or single income families.

The examination and debate on childcare in Ireland has a long history, yet there has been little change over time in provision of childcare, despite increasing demands. There have also been numerous advisory groups and government reports initiated by the government to investigate the issue, including:

- Working Party on Childcare Facilities for Working Parents (*Report* 1983)
- NOW Programmes (beginning 1991)
- Pilot Childcare Initiative by the Department of Equality and Law Reform (1994)
- Commissions on the Status of Women (First Commission Report 1972, Second Commission Report 1993)
- Working Group on Childcare Facilities for Working Parents (*Report* 1994)
- Commission on the Family (*Report* 1998)
- National Forum on Early Childhood Education (*Report* 1998)
- *The Economics of Childcare in Ireland* (Goodbody 1998)
- Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare (*Report* 1999)
- *White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (Department of Education and Science 1999)
- Working Group of the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee (*Developing School Age Childcare* 2005).

The report by the Working Party on Childcare Facilities for Working Parents (1983) was one of the earliest attempts to outline the need for childcare facilities in Ireland. The Working Party recommended that a statutory scheme be set up for day care facilities for children of working parents:

*The scheme should apply to all types of existing day care services for children including childminding, play-groups, crèches catering for infants and toddlers up to 2 years of age, day-nurseries, pre-schools, kindergartens, day centres, which cater for children between 2 and 5 years of age, and out-of-school care facilities except those which may already be subject to some form of statutory regulation (1983: 1).*

The Working Party's suggestions were not heeded by the government, or by any successive governments since then, which led to McKenna's finding almost a decade later in 1992 that:

*Ireland has a low level of publicly funded nursery provision, for less than 2% of children; no nursery education; and a heavy reliance on playgroups offering short hours of attendance and with little public funding. Many children (64% of four year olds and 99% of five year olds) begin at primary school before the compulsory starting age of six; yet resources in many of these schools do not adequately meet the needs of these young children. (McKenna 1990, in Flanagan and Lyons 1999: 48)*

The successive findings and recommendations of government initiated reports and expert groups have often repeated the same needs for childcare (Fine-Davis *et al.* 2004: 63). Lack of action on childcare issues led to the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare (1999) to state simply that: "There is now a virtual crisis in childcare supply" (iv). The issue of childcare provision is still a prominent concern, and will undoubtedly be considered by those facing a crisis pregnancy.

These findings demonstrate both a perception that the Irish government should be involved in aiding parents with their caring responsibilities, and a lack of action at state level in response. In the study undertaken by Russell *et al.* (2002), a representative of the International Organisation of the Unemployed pointed out that in relation to childcare, "the state needs to get far more involved in terms of subsidised supply. I mean we take it for granted the state plays a massive role in terms of primary education, for example" (2002: 69). This frames early years childcare in the context of pre-school education responsibilities, an argument also advocated by many in the *Report on The National Forum for Early Childhood Education* (1999). Participants in the study by Coveney *et al.* (1998) also believed that the state should do more to share the responsibilities of childcare. The lack of action on childcare is pointed out in the survey by Flanagan and Lyons: *Equal Opportunities in the State Sponsored Sector* (1999), which found that while flexible working opportunities have improved, policies on direct or indirect childcare provision remained unchanged throughout the 1990s.

#### 4.4.2 Policy-based action

A recent EU comparative study, *The Rationale of Motherhood Choices: Influence of Employment Conditions and Public Policies*, ranked Ireland last in terms of public and publicly funded childcare systems (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 63). The following table illustrates the disparity between Ireland and other European countries in terms of childcare support. It shows the rankings of the fifteen EU countries:

**Table 4.1 Ranking of 15 EU countries according to how supportive their childcare system is of the dual-earner model**

Country	Score
Denmark	88.45
Sweden	78.86
Finland	56.69
France	51.3
Belgium	48.1
Luxembourg	43.09
Germany	39.76
Austria	36.5
Italy	35.66
Netherlands	34.63
United Kingdom	33.63
Portugal	23.13
Greece	19.47
Spain	18.37
Ireland	5.64

Note: Score is out of 100.

Source: Working to Our Advantage, report of the Forum on the Workplace of the Future (2005: 63)

The average rating of support is 40.87, which is close to the marks achieved by most countries - Ireland being the notable exception. The huge variation between the levels of support for parents in national childcare provisions/systems demonstrates the greater burden that Irish parents are under to meet childcare needs in comparison with their peers across the EU. These findings are reinforced by results from the OECD study of the early education sector in Ireland (2004). They found that Ireland spent below the average expenditure of OECD countries on early childhood services and recommended an immediate increase in budgets in order to reach the median expenditure rates, which should also be coupled with improved policies for women's employment and family support (OECD 2004: 10). These findings clearly show how far Ireland has to go before it reaches parity with other EU and OECD countries in policy based action. This has an impact on the lives of all working parents, but difficulties in relation to childcare may be a significant factor for those facing a crisis pregnancy if they perceive that they will not be able to manage childcare responsibilities easily. However, it must be noted that the increased funding under the new proposed National Childcare Strategy (2006-2010) will help to ease the difficulties of parents in relation to funding of and access to childcare.

The Government has responded to pressure for change in childcare policy over the last number of years. The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (2000-2006), funded through the National Development Plan and European Structural Funds, has already provided 26,000 childcare places, with another 15,000 places scheduled to be created by

the end of the scheme in 2007. The National Childcare Investment Programme is part of the National Childcare Strategy (2006-2010). The new initiative aims to substantially increase the supply of childcare places (50,000 places by the end of 2010) and to assist parents with the cost of childcare. The National Childcare Strategy will cover both current and capital spending, costing a cumulative €2.65 billion. Overall responsibility for this scheme is with the Childcare Directorate of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The Budget for 2006 also proposed a new payment to parents of children under 6 years of age: the Early Childcare Supplement. This payment is worth €1,000 per annum, payable in quarterly instalments commencing in April 2006. This is a direct, non-taxable payment to parents. Despite it being called a childcare supplement, it is not linked to formal childcare payments, and is open to all parents with children under six years, not just those who use childcare facilities. This payment will aid the financial burdens of parents, and its impact on childcare costs (i.e. whether it will have an inflationary effect on paid childcare) will remain to be seen (see section 4.11 for further discussion of childcare costs).

Part of the debate around childcare provision has been on the differing perceptions of an ideal environment for childcare and what constitutes 'quality'. Apart from developing regulations covering equipment and staff-to-child ratios to ensure standards, there are more psychological debates on optimum childcare settings and quality in childcare. There is no universally accepted standard of quality given the fact that quality is often understood as a context specific and culturally sensitive concept (McGrath in *Childminding Ireland 2004b*: 15). McGrath (*ibid.*) outlines the following indicators of quality, which are included in most definitions of quality childcare settings:

- training
- parental involvement
- provider/child interactions
- child/child interactions
- networks and linkages between childcare centres and between centres and associations
- provision of support for individual centres and networks
- respect for diversity
- intentionality - pride in their work and responsiveness on the part of family day care providers.

Other facets of quality in childcare are compliance with health and safety regulations and developmentally appropriate play opportunities (Wilson in *Childminding Ireland 2004b*: 38). These indicators are suggestive of a professional, participatory and holistic environment that would provide safe and stable care for the child.

Funding is aimed at increasing childcare places to enhance the work-life balance needs of parents. There are capital grants for upgrading existing childcare facilities or for building new facilities, which is open to both community based and private providers, or a consortium of both. This is crucial to extending choice for parents in the market, which will have additional the benefits of increasing competition and quality in a wider market. There is also an emphasis in the programme on developing services for disadvantaged

areas, including staffing grants and grants for providing after-school care, which will provide monies for staffing and equipment. The Budget for 2006 announced plans to fund training for childcare workers, with the aim of training more than 17,000 workers by 2010.

The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme has draft plans to regulate the private childminding sector through the local county and city childcare committees. There are thirty-three childcare committees in Ireland, one for each county, and four for Dublin - Dublin City, Dublin Fingal, South Dublin, and Dun Laoghaire. These committees are responsible for childcare services in their catchment area, and receive governmental funding. As such, they are an integral part of the state's childcare system, and they will be crucial to further policy and funding developments in Ireland.

A new childminding tax relief is being introduced in 2006, which will aid the efforts to include private childminders in the formal childminding market. The scheme will allow an individual to mind up to three children in their own home, with no tax payable on the childminding earnings received, provided the amount is less than €10,000 per annum. If the childminding income exceeds this, the total amount will be taxable, as normal, under self-assessment. An individual will be obliged to return their childminding income in their annual tax return and also to notify their County Childcare Committee that they are providing a childminding service.

At the same time as provision of larger scale childcare services is being boosted, the National Childminders Initiative (NCMI) was launched in December 2003 to improve provision and standards in private childminding. The NCMI has two strands: the Childminders Development Grants and the Quality Awareness Programme (QAP). The grants provide funding for increasing the number of childminding places, and for assisting existing and prospective childminders by providing financial assistance to enhance the quality and safety of their service. Grants are available for 90% of costs, to a maximum of €630. Funding can be used for safety equipment or for appropriate play equipment, books and toys. The Quality Awareness Programme had a budget of €2.89 million in 2004, and is administered through the city and county childcare committees. Training sessions for childminders are weekly for a period of five weeks. Training is designed to provide advice concerning the role and responsibilities of childminders, and to educate childminders on current thinking on childcare (Doherty in Childminding Ireland 2004a: 18). Latest figures for the programme, (up to August 2004), show that a total of 907 childminders have completed the QAP, a significant number that will undoubtedly increase over time.

There are a number of voluntary childcare groups and consortia endeavouring to enhance childcare provision and quality in Ireland. These groups can avail of funding through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme. For example, Childminding Ireland is an organisation for private childminders currently comprised of 700 members<sup>19</sup> (as of December 2004) and is a growing support and advocacy agency for parents, children and childminders alike. Other such organisations include IPPA - the Early Childhood Organisation - whose membership of over 2,000 includes playgroups, parent and toddler groups, daycare centres, after-school and out-of-school groups and individual members.

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<sup>19</sup> This figure is relatively small; however, Childminding Ireland aims to increase the professionalism of private childminding by encouraging childminders to formally register.

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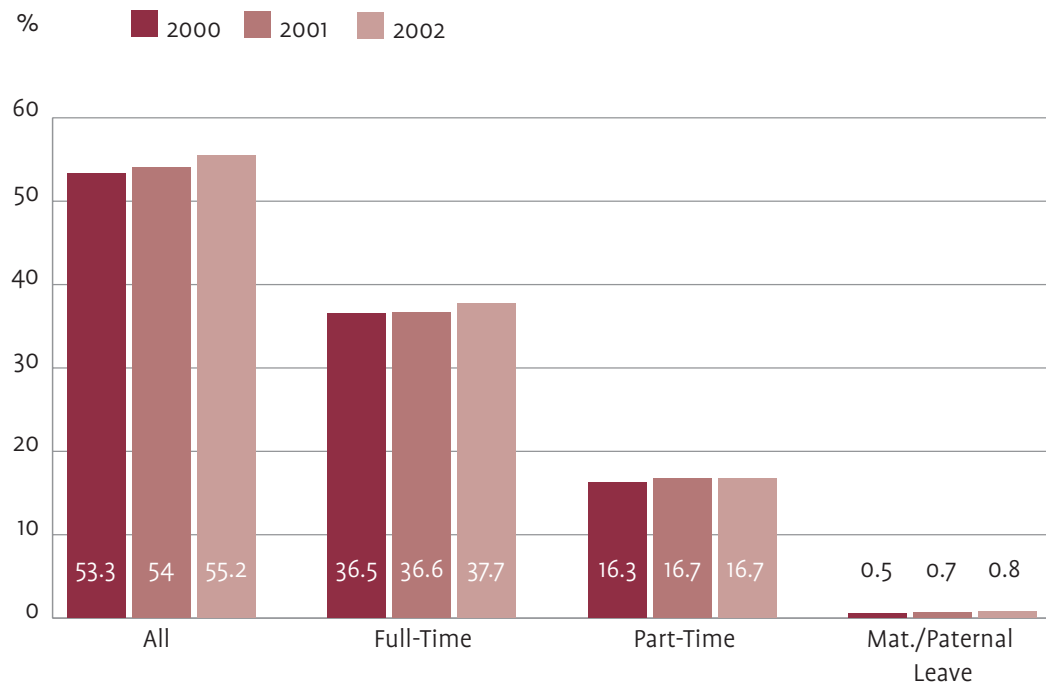
In December 2004 an umbrella body, The National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative, was formally launched<sup>20</sup> with the aim of informing national policies on childcare (*Childminding Ireland Newsletter*, December 2004: 2). This will include significant contributions from childminders, a cohort that, while important in the childcare market, have not been included to a large extent in the various consultation processes on childcare. It is yet to be seen what developments will occur from this collaboration, but it may prove to be a way to access childminders and assess their views, a significant contribution in itself given the current difficulties of accessing this group because many are not in the formal economy or official childminding regulatory system.

#### 4.5 Labour-force participation rates of mothers

The OECD study *Babies and Bosses* (2003) provides comparative information for Ireland, Japan and Austria on the incidence of labour-force participation by mothers. For example, in 2001, 54% of Irish mothers with children were in employment, similar to Japan (55.7%), whilst Austrian mothers work more, with a participation rate of 64.8% (2003: 48). This may be due to more generous flexible working and statutory leave arrangements, but it may also be due to the high incidence of work-life balance policies, a factor that makes them normative. The more flexible working arrangements are adopted, the more they will be availed of, and the easier it will be for mothers to combine work and family life.

The following graph and tables outline the working patterns of Irish mothers with children up to the ages of sixteen.

**Fig. 4.1 Total proportion of Irish women working, with children up to 16 years, who are in employment or on leave (%)**



Source: Table 2.4 in OECD (2003). *Babies and Bosses*. OECD: Paris.

<sup>20</sup> The National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative has been in existence since 2000 but was formally launched in 2004. See [www.childminding.ie](http://www.childminding.ie)

**Table 4.2 Breakdown of working patterns of Irish mothers with children from 0 up to 16 years old (%)**

Year	Children 0 to 16 years old*				Children 6 to 16 years old*		
	All of	F/T	P/T	M/P	All of	F/T	P/T
1986	18.2	...	...	0.8	17.7	...	...
1991	28.5	...	...	1.1	25.9	...	...
1996	38.9	21.9	15.9	1.0	36.8	19.2	16.8
2000	49.8	27.3	21.4	1.1	41.8	17.8	24.1
2001	50.7	26.4	22.5	1.7	50.6	24.9	25.7
2002	51.7	27.7	22.2	1.9	51.1	22.0	29.1

Source: Adapted from Table 2.4 in OECD (2003). *Babies and Bosses*. OECD: Paris.

F/T - full-time

P/T - part-time

M/P - on maternity or parental leave

\* Data is for children up to 14 years after 2000

From this data we can see that:

- the total number of women working full-time has risen
- mothers with children of all ages up to sixteen have also increased their employment levels, in both full- and part-time working
- the percentage of women on maternity or parental leave has also risen, due in part most probably to the extension of maternity rights in Ireland.

From this data we can conclude that women are participating more fully in the labour market now than ever before. However, the significant rises in rates of female employment have not been matched by increased provision of childcare. Women are also utilising maternity and parental leave to a greater extent, which suggests that they are choosing to stay in the labour market and avail of leave and flexible arrangements more now than before. One flaw of this data is that it does not make a distinction between the two types of leave, which does not allow for an accurate reflection on trends in leave take-up, or indeed a precise view of women's activity in the labour market. It is not always guaranteed that a woman will return to work after maternity leave.

It is also widely recognised in the literature that childcare responsibilities can act as a major barrier to women's participation in the labour market (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare 1999, O'Connor 1999, Coveney *et al.* 1998, Russell *et al.* 2002, Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005). The Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform's report *Women and Men in Ireland: Facts and Figures* states that:

*The numbers of women working full-time decreased with increased number of children. The numbers working part-time increased up to the second child, then began to decline with three children or more. The numbers of women not in the labour force increased with increased number of children, from approximately 40% of women without children, to 66% of those with four or more children (2004: 34).*

The report also states that: "Caring has a greater impact on women's employment than on men's employment, with a lower percentage of women carers in employment than

non-carers, irrespective of their age" (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2004: 40). This demonstrates that women are currently burdened by care work to a greater extent than men, and this has a significant impact on their employment opportunities and choices.

Lone parents often have access to the training schemes that exist to help unemployed people return to the labour market, but these can also be prohibitive to those with caring responsibilities. Russell *et al.* (2002) found that most training schemes did not provide childcare facilities, and those that did were generally of limited capacity. They were also not flexible enough in hours to facilitate school pick-ups. It was found that the Community Employment (CE) schemes were more likely to offer sufficient flexibility; however, "they [CE schemes] were often viewed as self-development programmes rather than as a direct route into the paid workforce" (Russell *et al.* 2002: 3). This view points to the fact that there is a need for greater flexibility in training, and strengthened links between training and appropriately flexible employment in order to utilise skills obtained by participants.

Thus, childcare issues are a barrier to women's employment and training opportunities, as well as a constraint on women who are in the workforce. These are important issues that must be negotiated by women in order to increase their career prospects:

*... the issue of childcare is also at the centre of a series of multi-layered problems which women must attempt to resolve if they want to be part of the public sphere of work and training while they are at the same point in their lives involved in the private domestic sphere of their children and family life (Coveney et al. 1998: 1).*

#### **4.6 Maternity and the workplace**

Rights to maternity leave have significantly improved over the last decade, and women now have greater protection in their employment when they have a child. However, as outlined in the previous chapter, statutory and official employment policy can often be undermined by practices and the workplace culture in individual organisations. For example, the ongoing practice of not providing cover for women on maternity leave puts pressure on them and their colleagues, and "has played an important part in fuelling hostility towards the employment of women at any level" (O'Connor 1999: 237). This practice potentially makes women's re-entry into the workplace more fraught, as their colleagues may resent them personally for the extra workload they have experienced. Maternity and childcare entitlements at statutory level must also be supported by a workplace environment that takes seriously the responsibilities of working parents. It must also be an environment that relinquishes the strict distinction between work and non-work life, and realistically assumes that at times there will be pressing childcare issues that will impact on working time.

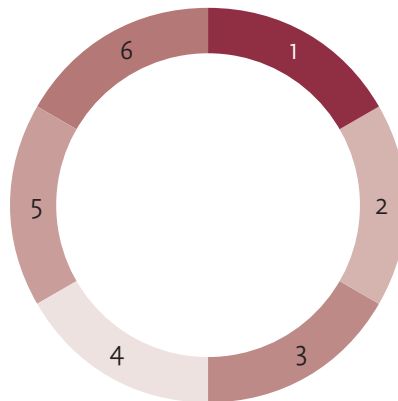
In cases where women avail of career breaks to care for their infants themselves, it has been found that they often experience significant barriers to re-entering the workforce, especially at a level comparable to their previous employment. There are a number of negative outcomes from this finding, both on a personal level for the individual, and at a wider economic level. Women who struggle to regain positions appropriate to their skills and experience will undoubtedly experience frustration and disappointment, as well as a negative impact on their earning capabilities. The Forum on the Workplace of the Future highlights the repercussions of this adverse trend:

*This results not only in a reduced return on the investment for the individual, the state and the employer in education and training, but it also acts as a competitive drag on our economy, and contributes to the significant gender pay gap (2005: 86).*

Thus, it seems obvious that the potential pitfalls of flexible working for women may lead them not to access these arrangements, and instead avail of professional services to meet their childcare needs. This also poses problems, given the lack of provision of childcare facilities and the high costs of such care.

However, given the greater likelihood of women working flexibly or part-time, in addition to the gender pay gap that currently exists, women are still more likely to temporarily - or permanently - leave the labour market to meet childcare needs. Bellamy and Rake (2005) see this as a vicious circle for women, as illustrated in Fig. 4.2:

**Fig. 4.2 Vicious circle for women with caring responsibilities in the labour market**



1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender pay gap and women's low pay means that...	Women rather than men take time out of labour market to care for the family. This means that...	Men generally work even longer hours to maintain household income, which means that...	It is difficult for women with caring responsibilities to compete with men in the labour market. This means that...	Women take low paid, flexible and p/time work in female dominated sectors, which brings us back to...	Gender pay gap and women's low pay

Source: Bellamy and Rake (2005). Money Money Money: Is it still a rich man's world? Fawcett Society. Available from [www.fawcettsociety.org.uk](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk)

The authors clearly link the constraints on women's participation in the workforce to caring responsibilities, which then become locked into a complex process, whereby it makes economic sense for women to undertake childcare, even though this contributes to their lack of opportunities.

Evidence from the literature draws attention to the fact that working parents are experiencing increasing levels of stress and with regard to their care responsibilities (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 20). Women's expectations of their lives now include work as well as motherhood, and this has created difficulties, as they do not always combine easily. However, as O'Connor notes: "It is increasingly recognised that it is not motherhood itself, but the way in which it is socially and culturally constructed, which is the crucial factor" (1999: 236). This suggests that attitudinal responses to, and cultural attitudes about, maternity and working can prohibit or enhance women's progress in employment.

A study that is currently being completed - *Work, Motherhood and Guilt* - exemplifies contemporary attitudes of working mothers to their well being as well as their perceptions on "the ideal mother" (McGoldrick (unpublished) 2005). Results from interviews suggest that women are still overburdened by childcare responsibilities, which can affect both their home and work life through feelings of stress, tiredness and depletion. A particularly revealing comment comes from a married mother of two, working full-time outside the home as a university lecturer:

*I am constantly stressed as I feel that I am not performing to the best of my ability at work, always rushing off to be with the children, and not performing to the best of my ability as a mother, as I don't see enough of my children. In term-time, (when I am working long hours) I feel constantly guilty and miserable, and am narky with my husband and the children, although I try not to be (McGoldrick 2005).*

This study shows that physical constraints of time and energy in relation to childcare responsibilities have multiple impacts: on the worker, the family, the spousal relationship and the workplace.

#### **4.7 Childcare impacts on women's career progression**

Bellamy and Rake argue simply that women pay a penalty due to their caring responsibilities, a factor that they consider to be contributory to the economic disparities between men and women. They call this disparity "the motherhood gap" (2005: 1), and argue that it means that women are not able to compete with men on equal terms in the labour market, including in progressing their careers. Evidence of this is also presented in Irish research. One quarter of all women who participated in an Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) study stated that they had not applied for promotional opportunities because of childcare responsibilities, and female workers constituted 90% of all those who stated that childcare duties hindered them from applying for promotion (ICTU 2002: 12).

A particularly important aspect that has been neglected in the research to date is the perspective of workers who do not currently have children. The qualitative study conducted by Murphy-Lawless *et al.* (2004), considers the perspective of women who are not currently mothers and addresses in brief the issue of working and motherhood (see section 2.2 for more on this study). When considering the prospect of having children, the dominant concerns expressed were adequate time to devote to work and family life, as well as the potential 'harm' it could have to their career progression (2004: 49). As one research participant stated:

*I'm progressing my career all the time at the moment, and since I left college it's been a steep enough curve and it will continue for another few years. But in another few years if I was to have a baby, it'll just change. It's just different, it's unequal between the guys and the women... (Murphy-Lawless et al. 2004: 49).*

The respondents recognised the struggles and challenges faced by mothers in Ireland, including the cost of childcare, access to maternity leave, family friendly working policies, flexitime, and the difficulties of work-life balance. The respondents felt these factors influenced their future decisions on whether or not to have a child. There was a general perception that mothers were unsupported in Ireland. They also identified the specific issue of men's need for support, education and involvement in childcare, although the authors rightly point out that this situation is hampered by current legislation that offers no provision for paternity leave (2004: 59-60).

#### **4.8 Modification of working time on becoming a parent**

Similar to Irish literature, international data indicates adjusted patterns in working time according to childcare responsibilities. According to the *Work-Life Balance 2000 Baseline Study* conducted in the U.K.:

- where mothers returned to work after maternity leave they went into part-time employment and had greater flexibility over their hours of work
- 56% of women who had taken maternity leave preferred greater flexibility over working hours to a longer period of maternity leave
- around half of workplaces provided paternity leave or leave to care for others.

These findings show that in the U.K. there are comparable trends to Ireland in attitudes towards caring responsibilities. There were positive responses to flexible working arrangements from both employees and employers where they were adopted. As with most policies, there was greater accessing of these by women, as well as greater accommodation for women to take time off than men. Low levels of provision of childcare services - either on site or elsewhere - were reported (see section 4.10 for further discussion), which seems a likely consequence of the lack of incentives for employers to provide such services. The Irish childcare situation is seen to be similar in this regard.

At present there are more Irish mothers than fathers who are working part-time (see section 2.5.2 on part-time working), indicating that mothers are more likely to be accommodating childcare responsibilities with their work arrangements (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005, Fine-Davis *et al.* 2004). The OECD (2003) also found that it is more common for mothers than fathers in Ireland to compromise their career to manage their childcare responsibilities. Specific evidence of this trend can be seen in the fact that 62% of women adjusted their working patterns on becoming a parent, in comparison to 27% of men who did the same (2003: 42). These findings are also upheld by the study by Drew *et al.* who found identical percentages (i.e. 62% and 27%) of women and men making modifications to their working time after having children (2003: 74). However, their published data is more detailed than the OECD study, and the following table shows the ways in which working time was modified, either by increased or decreasing working hours:

**Table 4.3 Employee increase or decrease in working time after having children (n=168)**

Working time	No. of men	% of men	No. of women	% of women	Total
Increased	17	22%	9	10%	26
Decreased	61	78%	81	90%	142
Total	78	100%	90	100%	168

Source: Drew et al. (2003). *Off The Treadmill*. National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies: Dublin.

From this data it can be seen that while the vast majority of working parents decreased their working time following the birth of their children, there were some parents who actually increased their working time. Of those who increased their working time, a higher proportion were fathers than mothers. This may be due to a range of factors, including increased costs of having a child, but further research is needed on this area in order to establish trends in modification of working time. Fine-Davis *et al.* provide international evidence of trends in modification of working time by parents (2004). In Ireland, Denmark, Italy and France, mothers were more likely to have modified their working time by decreasing their working hours, whilst fathers were more likely either not to have adjusted their working time, or to have increased their hours (in the case of Denmark and Ireland<sup>21</sup>). (See Fine Davis *et al.* 2004: Appendix A, Tables A55 and A56 (p277-278).)

#### 4.9 Women, men and caring

Research in the U.K. on time use and caring work has been carried out on a number of occasions in recent years. Time Use Surveys were conducted between June 2000 and September 2001 by the Office for National Statistics. The survey consisted of interviews with 11,700 individuals in 6,500 households who were then asked to record information in diary form. Research participants were asked to identify one or two activities for each ten-minute period on two days, one weekday and one weekend day.

Nearly half of mothers with a child under five years of age were not in paid employment; a third were working part-time and only a sixth worked full-time. In contrast, less than one in ten fathers were not in paid employment, and almost all working fathers were full-time employees (Equal Opportunities Commission 2002: 6). This may explain the fact that there were noticeable differences between mothers and fathers on the total time spent with or caring for their child, as outlined in the following table:

**Table 4.4 Breakdown of hours per day spent on childcare by parents (n)**

Childcare type	During the week		At weekends	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
Childcare as main activity	2hrs 10 mins	40 mins	1 hr 40 mins	1 hour
Childcare as a main or secondary activity	3hrs 10 mins	1 hour	2hrs 50 mins	1hr 40 mins
Time in the same place as child	7hrs 50 mins	4hrs 10 mins	9hrs 20 mins	7hrs 20 mins

Source: Adapted from Equal Opportunities Commission (2002). *Time Use and Childcare*. Available from [www.eoc.org.uk/cseng/research/time\\_use\\_and\\_childcare.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/cseng/research/time_use_and_childcare.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> This data relates to behaviour by mothers and fathers after the birth of their youngest child. Interestingly, male respondents in France and Italy reported no increase at all in their working time upon the birth of their youngest child..

From this data it is evident that among this sample women spent more time engaged in childcare than men, even on weekends when it is assumed that most people will have more free time. Time-use data is useful to elucidate trends in caring, although the limited generalisability of the data must be noted given the relatively small sample size.

Comparative research from Ireland is limited, although the Economic and Social Research Institute recently completed a scoping study on time use of men and women in Ireland - available through the ERSI website. The only other data of this kind for Ireland is the Central Statistics Office report, *Report on Pilot Time Use Survey* (1997), although this cannot be regarded as nationally representative in any way. The survey sample was taken from Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Waterford, and consisted of 251 individuals. Participants recorded data for one weekday and one weekend day, similar to the U.K. Time Use Survey. Questions on childcare were not specified individually, but it can be assumed that this would come under the category 'Household and family care'. On both weekdays and weekend days, women spent on average three times as long as men on household and family care. Conclusions from this data are limited by the obfuscating nature of the category. Accurate time-use data would give a clearer picture of the policies needed to aid working parents, particularly mothers, and it would also provide information on which to base a calculation of the value of this unpaid labour to the economy.

#### 4.10 Provision and use of childcare in Ireland and elsewhere

The latest data on childcare use is from the Central Statistics Office who conducted a special module on childcare as part of the Quarterly National Household Survey (Fourth Quarter 2002). Table 4.5 below details the results of this survey.

**Table 4.5 Non-parental care for pre-school or primary school-going children (n and %)**

Type of care	For pre-school children		For primary school children	
	Number	%*	Number	%*
Unpaid relative	22,800	31%	31,100	46%
Paid relative	8,800	12%	9,500	14%
Paid carer	21,500	29%	21,500	31%
Crèche/Montessori	19,800	27%	4,100	6%
Other	5,400	7%	2,900	4%

\* Percentage is as a total of number of households availing of pre-school or primary school care outside the home

Source: CSO, Quarterly National Household Survey 4th Quarter 2002, Adapted from Table 2<sup>22</sup>.

Fine-Davis *et al.* (2004) provide data on cross-country trends (Ireland, Italy, Denmark and France) in childcare use. Participants were asked who looked after their youngest child (under 6) most often when they were at work. Key findings included:

- the most frequently used childcare of this cohort was in the professional services category, including childcare centres, crèches and nursery groups

<sup>22</sup> Note that the CSO data from Table 2 allowed for multiple responses for type of childcare used. Consequently, the total does not equal the sum of the childcare types, but relates to the total number of households availing of childcare outside the home, i.e. it details use but not provision.

- Irish participants reported high rates of inter-family care (a total of 33.4%), comparable to Italy (36%)
- Irish participants also reported the highest rate of use of unregistered childminders of all the other countries (12.1% compared to France, 6%, and Italy and Denmark, 2% each).

The OECD (2004) assessed the type and amount of childcare services available in Ireland in their Early Childhood Education and Care Policy country note for Ireland. Results of their assessment are presented in the following table<sup>23</sup>:

**Table 4.6 Childcare services available in Ireland**

Type of service	Sessional	Full-day	Total number of services
Playgroup/pre-school	1,276	252	1528
Montessori school	402	229	631
Nursery/day care centre	-	414	414
'Other' service	113	118	231
Drop-in crèche	124	68	192
Naíonraí (Irish speaking nurseries)	159	3	162
Parent & toddler group	136	-	136
After school group	97	-	97
Workplace crèche	22	40	62
Homework club	43	-	43
Total	2372	1124	3496
Total number of childminders (estimated)			37,900

Source: OECD (2004). Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: Country Note for Ireland. Available from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/18/34425332.pdf>

This data establishes the fact that there are very few full-day facilities for children, a factor that means that working parents may have to use more than one type of care facility to meet their childcare needs if they work full-time, or may indeed push them into part-time work. The data also shows that private childminders are used to a much greater extent than any other service (see below for more discussion on this issue).

Workplace childcare facilities or crèches are infrequently provided to employees. Employees from the U.K. reported low levels of provision in the *Second Work-Life Balance Study* (2004). Only 24% of working parents reported they had access to some form of childcare provision at the workplace, although many reported they were unaware of their

<sup>23</sup> This data was taken from the ADM survey of childcare provision National Summary of County Childcare Census 1999/2000, and the figure for childminders is taken from The National Childcare Strategy, 1999. These figures are thus rather dated, but are the only data of this kind currently available.

employer's provisions. Interestingly, low levels of provision of childcare were matched by low levels of take-up; where employers provided some assistance 84% of parents of children under 16 had not made use of this support in the last year. Reasons for this are not made clear in the research, thus only speculative conclusions can be drawn, such as there were not enough places, or the facilities did not suit the needs of the employees. There were, however, positive accounts of the provision of childcare facilities from the employers. Employers in the study reported a positive effect on their employee relations due to the provision of workplace childcare facilities, (79%), as well as on labour turnover (73%) and employee motivation and commitment (72%).

In Ireland, the results are similar. Workplace crèche facilities were reported as being used by only 0.5% of the research participants in the study undertaken by ICTU, and all of these were working in the public sector (2002: 22). Reasons for the low level of usage of workplace childcare facilities were given as:

*"The facilities are fully booked out" (p21)*

*"It is just too awkward, the crèche is not anywhere near our home" (p21)*

*"If there was a crèche in work I would use it, but as there isn't I have to leave them with relatives as anything else wouldn't pay me to work" (p24).*

When questioned as to what should be the priorities of employers in response to childcare needs, childcare facilities within the workplace were rated as the first preference priority by 25.9% of workers, only second in importance behind the provision of flexible working arrangements, cited by 34.5% of employees (2002: 29).

Among the factors that influenced the choice of childcare arrangements in the ICTU study were cost, availability, and provision of flexible working policies. This highlights the fact that the difficulties experienced by parents in accessing adequate childcare services are bound up in both their workplace policies and the childcare market. A key factor, then, is choice: a parent's choices in childcare arrangements will be determined not only by what they can afford, but what they can access, and what will suit their employment demands. The most common forms of childcare reported as being used by ICTU members were:

- informally paid relative, friend or neighbour minding the child in their home (24.4%)
- formally paid childminder minding the child in their home (17.5%)
- unpaid family member or partner minding the child in child's home (12%).

This highlights the fact that informal networks of childcare are still the most popular options chosen by parents.

Drew *et al.* (2003) also established the types of childcare arrangements used by employees in their survey and, comparatively, their preferred childcare arrangements. The following table outlines the childcare arrangements of respondents at the time of the survey:

**Table 4.7 Current childcare arrangements of respondents (n and %)**

Childcare arrangement	Number of men		Number of women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
By partner	147	86.47	23	13.53	170	100
By other relative	28	43.75	36	56.25	64	100
By childminder	32	60.37	21	39.63	53	100
In private crèche	23	46.00	27	54.00	50	100
After school childminder	22	44.00	28	56.00	50	100
In work based crèche	5	55.56	4	44.44	9	100
After school in school	2	40.00	3	60.00	5	100
Other	16	59.25	11	40.75	27	100

Source: Adapted from Drew et al. (2003). *Off The Treadmill*. National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies: Dublin.

From this data it is evident that childminders are again the most used form of childcare outside family based solutions. It is also evident that the gender divisions in caring roles still persist, as over six times more men than women had their partner looking after their child(ren). The fact that this was an overwhelmingly preferred option by men is highlighted in the following data on first preferences for childcare arrangements:

**Table 4.8 First preference childcare arrangements (n= 530)**

Childcare arrangement	No. of men	% of men	No. of women	% of women	Total
By partner	199	63%	49	23%	248
In work based crèche	30	9%	52	25%	82
By other relative	25	8%	44	21%	69
By childminder	20	6%	21	10%	41
In private crèche	14	4%	12	6%	26
After school childminder	11	3%	14	7%	25
After school in school	15	5%	9	4%	24
Other	7	2%	8	4%	15
Total	321	100%	209	100%	530

Source: Adapted from Drew et al. (2003). *Off The Treadmill*. National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies: Dublin.

Whilst family based solutions to childcare rank highest by men, work based crèches are given the highest rating by women. This may be for a number of factors, including recognition of the fact that two incomes are needed to sustain a household. Parents may believe that professional childcare services may offer other/more social and educative benefits than home-based care. This preference was also found by the CSO (Quarterly National Household Survey, 4th Quarter 2002:3). Recent literature has espoused the benefit of early childhood education, and the government has stated that care facilities for pre-school children should aim to be educative environments (Department of Education and Science 1999); although, particularly with the new state-aided grants for childcare, this environment could be established in both childcare centres and private residences. The desire for childcare outside the home may also be due to the fact that there are currently more female lone parents who would need to avail of this type of childcare if they are engaged in employment or training because they do not have a partner to share childcare with. It is also interesting to note that family-based and work-based care is preferred over childminding care by both men and women in Drew *et al.*'s study, which suggests that although parents currently use childminding in high proportions, this may be due to lack of provision of other more desirable services.

The OECD study *Babies and Bosses* (2003) points out a number of problems with this reliance on informal paid childcare in Ireland. Apart from the fact that it can be expensive - prohibitively so for some parents - it is also not a sustainable source of childcare provision. Older women have traditionally been childminders, a cohort with fewer labour market opportunities than younger women, and as this cohort ages the supply of childminders will diminish. In addition, the supply of childminders will not be replenished by similar numbers of younger women, as this cohort are ever more likely to be entrenched in the labour market. On an individual level also, this source of childcare can be unreliable - if a childminder is sick or unable to work, there is no substitute for their services, unlike in a crèche or childcare centre. Furthermore, the government's desire to promote early childhood educative care cannot be fulfilled if they are not able to regulate childminders. This process will have to aim to be supportive as well as regulatory in order to succeed. It may also have to provide specialised training for childminders in order for them to achieve standards. One issue that will need to be addressed is the high percentage of literacy problems amongst childminders (Childminding Ireland 2004b: 47), which will need attention if communication is to be effective and standards raised.

The organisation, Childminding Ireland, conducted a study in 2004 (2004b) of its members<sup>24</sup> addressing quality and standards in childminding. It showed varying experiences of childminders in contact with official childcare services. For example, a Pre-School Services Inspector had visited all those surveyed, whilst, in comparison, an Environmental Health Officer had visited only 76%. There were mixed views of the support received through official structures. Whilst some were pleased with information and suggestions, others felt they were unfairly judged by crèche standards. There was also an issue of when the Inspector arrived - experiences varied according to circumstances on the day and whether minded children were present or not. The study

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24 It must be noted that the membership of Childminding Ireland represents a small sample of those engaged in childminding in Ireland.

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is informative but limited, and a similar, extended survey of this type would yield important information.

Due to demographic trends in the age at which women now give birth there will be an even greater demand for childcare in the next decade. The average age of first time motherhood is now 28.2 years (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 62). According to the ESRI, by 2013 there will be a further 150,000 women aged in their thirties; thus, assuming the age and rate of childbearing stays constant, there will be a correlative increase in demand for affordable and satisfactory childcare (*Ibid.*). It is estimated that by 2010 a total of around 210,000 - 220,000 childcare places, in both the formal and informal sector, will be needed (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare 1999). This will require a significant increase in provision in all sectors of the childcare market.

#### 4.11 Cost of childcare

The issue of cost is extremely important when considering the case of women facing crisis pregnancy, and it may be an influencing factor in the decision-making process of whether or not to proceed with the pregnancy. In terms of cost, Irish parents pay on average 20% of their annual income towards childcare, which is almost twice the European average of 12% (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 62). This high cost may have negative impacts on women's employment. For example, "a second earner with earnings at two-thirds of average earnings in a couple family with two young children has no net return from work after childcare costs" (OECD 2003: 25).

Childcare benefit is provided universally to all parents in Ireland. This payment has been significantly increased in the last decade - by almost 300% (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 88). This is not linked to means, or to childcare use, and it is suggested by the OECD (2003) that payments could be linked to childcare use in order to maximise benefits for working parents. In the last budget the amount was raised as expected, but there was no extension of its terms and it was not connected to childcare costs. A cautionary piece of anecdotal evidence comes from the OPEN<sup>25</sup> report *Do the Poor Pay More?*, which detailed the case of one female research participant whose crèche fees increased after the rise in child benefit (2005: 13). This factor would have to be considered in any proposed changes to the child benefit system. There is also no tax relief for parents using childcare services, a suggestion offered by contributors during the consultation by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency for a strategy to address the issue of crisis pregnancy (2004a: 27). Thus, childcare costs are almost entirely born by parents. The newly proposed Early Childcare Supplement, worth €1,000 per annum, may be used by parents to fund childcare costs, although it is not tied to childcare payments and is offered to all parents of children under six years of age, regardless of whether they used paid childcare or not (see section 4.4.2).

There are varying ranges of expenditure reported in the literature:

- the OECD have calculated that childminding, the most popular form of childcare in Ireland, costs about US\$550 per child per month according to (2003: 25). This is twice as high as costs in Austria and Japan.

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<sup>25</sup> This is an organisation representing lone parent groups in Ireland

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- the most common range of weekly expenditure reported by respondents in the ICTU report was between €102 and €126 (2002: 17)
- the CSO calculated an average national cost of childcare (based on all types of provision) to be €97.47 per week. Their data suggested considerable regional variation, with parents in Dublin paying the highest fees in the country (QNHS, 4th Quarter 2002:2)
- respondents in Drew et al.'s employee survey paid an average of €128 per week (2003: 97)
- Childminding Ireland released a scale of pay for childminders in Ireland<sup>26</sup>: the rate for full-time care (up to 40 hours) is suggested at €4.50 per hour; the rate for part-time care (up to 22 hours) is €6.75; an overtime rate of €6.36 per hour and an unsocial hours rate of €8.16 are also suggested
- the most recent estimates on childcare costs show regional variations in costs, with prices in Dublin ranging on average between €165 and €185 per week<sup>27</sup>.

Cost as a barrier to access of childcare facilities for lone parents is also highlighted by the OECD study. They give the example of a hypothetical lone parent living in Dublin on average earnings; the cost of childcare for one child would be 30% of their after-tax income, unless they could access cheaper community care (2003: 148). This calculation indicates that access to childcare can determine take-up of employment for lone parents. Affordability of childcare is also an issue addressed in the study by Murphy-Lawless *et al.*, who reported that lone parents had to put cost above all other variables when making choices about childcare (2004: 58). This may well be against their wishes, as the respondents in McCashin's study (1996) reported that their concern was mainly for their child's well being, over and above their lack of income. Many respondents felt that the government needed to help parents in accessing and affording childcare. Unfortunately, the fact remains that: "Affordable childcare has been on the public agenda for the last decade with no substantive government action" (Murphy-Lawless *et al.* 2004: 58).

#### 4.12 Summary of chapter four

- Irish legislation on maternity and childcare covers time-off for mothers and parents, and regulations regarding childcare facilities (see section 2.3.2 for further details on legislation).
- In comparison with other EU countries, Ireland rates particularly poorly in terms of state subsidised or supported childcare facilities. This has an impact on the lives of all working parents, but may particularly affect those facing a crisis pregnancy if they perceive that they will not be able to easily manage childcare responsibilities if they continue with the pregnancy.
- Childcare as a policy issue has a long history in Ireland. Successive governments have funded research and established committees to examine the problems for parents in relation to childcare. In more recent years there

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<sup>26</sup> This is a guide suggested by the organisation and not a statutory or enforceable set of rates. See [www.childminding.ie](http://www.childminding.ie) for further details on rates

<sup>27</sup> 'Crèches Crisis' in the Evening Herald, 23rd March 2005, page 4.

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have been substantial funding increases for childcare places, training of childcare workers, and grants for improving or creating childcare centres. The National Childcare Strategy (2006-2010) has a budget of €2.65 billion to fund such improvements.

- Recent initiatives to tackle the childcare crisis have included funding for childcare centres and attempts to engage private childminders in training. It is too early to accurately assess the impact of these policies; however, they are bound to aid at least some working parents, particularly those who utilise childcare centres and crèches.
- The total number of women working in Ireland full-time has risen. Mothers with children of all ages up to sixteen have increased their employment levels, in both full- and part-time working.
- The percentage of women on maternity or parental leave has also risen, due in part most probably to the extension of maternity rights in Ireland.
- In cases where women avail of career breaks to care for their infants themselves, it has been found that they often experience significant barriers to re-entering the workforce, especially at a level comparable to their previous employment.
- Women's employment status is more directly affected by childcare responsibilities than men's. The number of women working full-time decreases with an increased number of children. The number working part-time increases up to the second child, then declines with three children or more. (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2004: 34)
- Research on women who do not have children shows that they consider their career goals are important, and they see these goals as under threat or irreconcilable with motherhood given the present labour and social policies in Ireland. This is important, as those facing a crisis pregnancy may have similar concerns over their career progression.
- More women than men modify their working time on becoming a parent, both internationally and nationally. Specific evidence of this trend is provided by the OECD: 62% of women adjusted their working patterns on becoming a parent, in comparison to 27% of men who did the same (2003: 42). These findings are also upheld by the study by Drew et al. (2003), which found identical percentages (62% of women; 27% of men) making modifications to their working time after having children (2003: 74). Evidence from Fine Davis et al. (2004) also confirms the gender differences in modification of working time by parents.
- Research on time use shows that women spend more time engaged in caring for, and even spending time with, their children than men. More research on time use is needed in order to accurately assess this data as it has only been piloted on a limited sample size.
- In assessing childcare arrangements in research respondents from France, Denmark, Italy and Ireland, it was found that the most frequently used childcare of this sample was in the professional services category, including childcare centres, crèches and nursery groups. Ireland has a high rate of inter-family care, comparable to France (Fine-Davis et al. 2004).

- In Ireland, research suggests that there is a high reliance on child-minders, which means that parents frequently have to source childcare in the private/informal sector.
- In terms of cost, Irish parents pay on average 20% of their annual income towards childcare, which is almost twice the European average of 12% (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 62).
- The most recent estimates on childcare costs show regional variations in costs, with Dublin having the highest costs. Childcare is prohibitively expensive for some workers, hence the reliance on family members. This will impact on those facing a crisis pregnancy, particularly if they do not have family members available to help out with childcare if they decide to continue with the pregnancy.

#### 4.13 Conclusions

Maternity and childcare issues will perhaps have the most direct impact on those facing a crisis pregnancy. The provision of flexible working arrangements will undoubtedly be an important factor for such individuals to consider, as will the childcare services either at the workplace or in the local area. Issues of cost will also play a role in the decision-making process, particularly if one is not yet well established in a career. Finally, it can be seen from the literature that parents currently rely heavily on relatives to meet their childcare needs, and this will be an important factor for those facing a crisis pregnancy as they may not be supported by their family if they decide to keep a child.

Maternity and childcare issues are seen to be important policy considerations in Ireland in recent years. Improvements in legislation surrounding maternity leave have been welcomed, and further improvements are planned over the next five years. However, it is evident that further improvements are desired in the provision of childcare places, particularly for infants and pre-school children. There is also a call for tax relief for childcare payments, which are often high, particularly in urban areas. In addition, legislation for paternity leave is called for by many in order to promote men in caring, and to lessen the gender divide in domestic responsibilities.

Individual workplaces are often experienced as stressful by working parents due to the competing pressures of work and domestic life. Flexible working policies are beneficial in many respects for harmonising the two, but more needs to be done to ensure that all parents have equal access to flexible working practices. In addition, the flexibility needs of fathers need to be addressed, due to the lack of statutory provision for leave arrangements for working fathers, and the fact that many appear to be prohibited from availing of work-life balance policies due to workplace culture norms or practices. Finally, the research shows clearly that children have different needs at different stages in their development, thus it seems obvious that social and employment policies should be tailored to accommodate the changing needs of parents and children over the life cycle.

## 5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions of the literature review

The literature on work-life balance, workplace culture and maternity/childcare issues is interrelated and complementary. Many issues cross over to the extent that they are equally important for consideration under more than one heading. For example, work-life balance policies are important for achieving greater harmony between work and personal responsibilities for all workers, but they are particularly crucial for working parents. Similarly, workplace cultures that are supportive of work-life balance policies will be experienced as positive environments for all workers, but particularly by those that have personal responsibilities such as caring for children or elderly relatives, or for those engaged in education and training. This level of interrelated complexity is particularly important to point out in relation to crisis pregnancy issues, as those facing such a pregnancy may not have thought about parenting before, and may immediately look to the current situation of working parents in their workplace as a way to figure out their options.

For those facing a crisis pregnancy, the range of choices may not be entirely clear, and there may be confusion, especially around the option of adoption. The outcome of those choices may also not be clear to an individual faced with the task of making them. Confusion over the best possible outcome on a personal level may be affected by external factors, and the workplace may be a key point of influence. Provision of work-life balance policies and a workplace culture that supports parents may positively influence the decision to continue with the pregnancy. It may also influence any decisions about whether parenting is compatible with creating and sustaining work-life balance. The reverse may also be true: if the workplace culture does not support work-life balance and/or working parents, those facing a crisis pregnancy may feel it is impossible to continue with the pregnancy if they have a commitment to that particular career or workplace. The decision-making process, as influenced by workplace structures and policies, is a topic that must be explored further in relation to those facing a crisis pregnancy.

What is clear from the literature is that there is a consistent and increasing demand for change in the workplace through the adoption of work-life balance as a guiding policy. This is because issues of work-life balance are as relevant to working parents as to men and women who do not have children. As Drew *et al.* comment:

*Flexible working arrangements are not a 'women's issue', they are a 'people issue'. All employees, irrespective of their family situation or personal responsibilities, need and want to have greater balance between their lives inside and outside work (2003: 28).*

This is important to remember, especially in considering the case of those facing unplanned reproductive choices. If work-life balance is promoted, and flexible working arrangements are already part of their working lives, an unplanned pregnancy may not be perceived as a crisis for their job or career plans.

Changes in the workplace will be experienced as difficult or easy to achieve to varying degrees according to the type of enterprise. Some organisations have already successfully met this challenge, managing to adopt working practices that suit both the

employer and the employee, which is the ideal outcome of work-life balance initiatives. Resistance to change has also been experienced, although it must be noted that many employers are now requesting help in order to create change, as well as more information on how to achieve best practice as an employer and in business. There are clear business arguments for adopting work-life balance initiatives, including improved recruitment, increased retention of skilled staff, and increased employee morale, all of which will impact on performance and production.

### 5.1.1 *Gaps in the research*

As yet there is a dearth of in-depth attitudinal research that encompasses the experiences of those who do not have children on both flexible working arrangements and childcare policies. Obviously, the first stage in the research process would be the effect of work-life balance policies on parents. However, those that do not currently have children are potential future parents, and their decisions regarding whether or not to have children may be influenced by their current workplace. Their attitudes may also reveal information as to what they would do if faced with a crisis pregnancy, and if their decision would be influenced at all by their workplace. It would also be valuable to know whether or not, and the extent to which, they avail of flexible working arrangements, as well as for what purposes, as this would indicate future trends in support - or non-support - of flexible working practices. Also, little is known about their attitudes to their working-parent colleagues, and whether or not they feel flexible working arrangements are justified for working parents.

There is little known about this cohort's (i.e. non-parents), intentions for their future employment practices and whether or not these will be affected by flexible working policies and/or children. It seems likely that if an individual works in an organisational culture that promotes long hours and prohibits flexibility, this will play a role in their decision-making process about whether or not, when, and/or how many children they have. It may also affect the personal relationships in their life, which would affect their decisions about children also. The opposite may also be true: if an employee experiences a flexible workplace that accommodates personal responsibilities, such as childcare, this may affect their decision-making process in a crisis pregnancy situation. However, these hypotheses about the workplace have yet to be established in detail through research.

Fine-Davis *et al.*'s (2004) study on Ireland, France, Denmark and Italy highlights some important areas for further research. The authors identify the need for more information so as to gain greater understanding of the pressures facing working parents as well as to help inform developing social policy, both at the workplace and at governmental level (Fine-Davis *et al.* 2004: 220-221). The findings highlighted the following issues: there needs to be promotion of equitable work-life balance policies that not only benefit the individual but also the collective; women need to be relieved of the double burden of work and family responsibilities; men need to be encouraged and supported to take a more active role in family and domestic life; employers are responding with partial, but not sufficient, workplace flexibility; individual countries are responding with varying levels of social support for workers with families. All of these issues require further investigation in Ireland - through research - in order to strengthen the evidence base for policy makers.

There is an almost complete gap in knowledge about the role of men in decision making around crisis pregnancy and, indeed, around the take-up by either partner in such a situation of flexible working arrangements as a way to harmonise unexpected work and caring responsibilities. It is clear from the literature that mothers are more likely to compromise their employment patterns to accommodate children, but it is not clear why this trend is so prevalent. Suggested reasons for this are the gendered wage differentials, which see men earn more than women, or the gendered market segregation that sees women avail of flexible working more easily than men because their jobs are seen as more suitable to these arrangements. Another reason could be that workplace pressure on fathers prevents them from availing of parental leave or work-life balance policies. In the case of a crisis pregnancy, it is not clear whether the employment practices of the father have any bearing on the decision to keep a child or not, as most literature focuses on the decision-making process of the mother, and her circumstances. Similarly, fathers will have an influence in decisions on childcare arrangements, but we do not specifically know to what extent these decisions are made either between parents or by one or the other alone.

### *5.1.2 Limitations of current literature*

It can be seen from a review of the literature that some studies fail to maximise their potential results by asking questions that are limited or ill-phrased. It is also important to note the response rates and sample sizes of each study, as this will determine the generalisability of the research findings. If a research sample is small, or not diversified geographically, socially, or in terms of occupation, the findings will be unrepresentative of the general population. For example, the ICTU study (2002) had a response rate of only 17%, which limits the generalisability of its findings. Findings also refer only to union members, thus they do not include the views of non-union members. It must be stated, however, that the ICTU survey used postal questionnaires, a methodology that is generally less successful in achieving high response rates than one-on-one interviews or telephone surveys. Another issue is the fact that surveys are not standardised in any way, which makes their findings difficult at times to compare and contrast, a process that is essential in order to obtain a comprehensive yet nuanced view of a particular research sample. In addition, data on employees, flexible practices and childcare provision or policies is not being collected annually or in any systematic way, which would allow regular examination of trends in the workplace.

There are also examples of missed opportunities in surveys. The Childminding Ireland survey (2004) of its members was an interesting insight into private childminders' experience of interactions with the formal childcare and health and safety systems. The intention of this survey was to evaluate the relationship between the childminders and the state system. Its limited scope was a missed opportunity to analyse their views on other facets of their job, such as their income, their levels of training, their routines, and their suggestions for improvements in the childcare system. It must be noted, however, that Childminding Ireland is representative only of those childminders who are registered and members of their organisation, and thus they cannot investigate those that operate solely in the informal economy.

Similarly, other studies, in their published data, reveal little if any disaggregated statistics that would allow more in-depth knowledge of the research sample. For

example, the studies undertaken by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (2004) reveal responses from employees and employers, but further breakdowns of the data would have revealed much more. Differentiated categories such as age, gender, occupational class or socio-economic status would give more precise information that could be used in secondary data analyses, or to follow up for further studies.

Literature examining work-life balance, workplace culture and maternity and childcare issues is generally descriptive in nature, i.e. explaining the incidence and take-up of flexible working and childcare arrangements. O'Keeffe (2004) pointed out that a theoretical model linking attitudes and intentions with behaviour and outcomes is needed to understand crisis pregnancy. Similarly, it is necessary to make theoretical links between the three thematic areas of this literature review in order to understand what is currently happening in Irish workplaces. Such an approach would attempt to connect attitudes and actual behaviours, which are not always considered within the same study. Even when they are considered, there is little attempt to correlate them or to draw a direct analysis. If this were done, it would provide fruitful information on the reality of the workplace, rather than an unclear statement of people's attitudes on the one hand and their behaviours on the other. It would allow for a proper assessment of changes made in organisations in any of these areas.

## 5.2 Recommendations for policy makers

### 5.2.1 *Work-life balance policy recommendations*

Both national and international literature on the implementation of work-life balance policies recommends that:

- policies be implemented as a result of a consultation process between employers and employees, and that communication is prioritised throughout the process (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005, IBEC 2002)
- flexible working arrangements be piloted on a small scale before they are implemented on a larger scale (NCP 2003a, IBEC 2002)
- proposed changes in working arrangements be considered by representatives from all grades of staff in the organisation (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005)
- action on possible solutions is taken rather than further policy initiatives that are not implemented (Fitzpatrick 2005)
- practical, tailored advice on work-life balance policies and flexible working initiatives be provided to meet the needs of individual enterprises (IBEC, website [www.ibec.ie/ibec/ibecdoclib3.nsf/0/53E3A807638AD19F80256FE1005879AE?OpenDocument](http://www.ibec.ie/ibec/ibecdoclib3.nsf/0/53E3A807638AD19F80256FE1005879AE?OpenDocument)).

### 5.2.2 *Workplace culture policy recommendations*

Both national and international literature concerning policies related to workplace cultures recommends that:

- workplace innovation be promoted and disseminated widely as a key strategic response to current and future economic and social challenges (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005, Kodz et al. 2002, IBEC 2002)

- a three-year dedicated fund be given to the National Centre for Partnership and Performance to promote innovation and research in human resource management, organisational change and lifelong learning at enterprise level (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 74)
- indicators be developed for internationally comparative standards of best practice in performance and workplace innovation (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005: 74)
- partnership-style approaches be adopted, both in the public and private sector, in order to achieve more positive workplace relations in all organisations - including employee financial involvement (NCPD 2003b)
- flexible working policies should be promoted in a way that ensures that those who avail of them are not adversely affected in their career paths (Fine-Davis et al. 2004, Bunting 2004).

The Families and Work Institute carried out research on the area of work-life balance and concluded that the key to change lies in the workplace culture (Fitzpatrick 2005: 26). They outlined a four-stage process for implementing change that involved a step-by-step process culminating in a radical reorganisation of work. The following are the four stages outlined:

Stage 1: Grass roots - address childcare and women's issues in the workplace.

Stage 2: Human resources - address recruitment and retention of employees.

Stage 3: Culture change - emphasise that work-life balance involves all individuals in the workplace and requires input from all groups.

Stage 4: Work redesign - reorganise work in such a way as to meet both organisation and employee goals.

This staggered process is a helpful illustration of how change may be achieved if the emphasis is on changing the entire workplace culture, and not just about changing the employment practices of select individuals.

Duxbury, Higgens and Coghill (2002, in Work-life Balance Network, 2004) recommend the following policies and practical initiatives to improve work-life balance through changing workplace culture:

- awareness training for managers
- organisational support of work-life balance
- childcare provision
- policy-level improvements such as increased benefits, flexibility and leave, support of family commitments and a reduction in working hours.

These proposed changes would alter the structure of the organisation to make it more open to flexibility and change. This, in turn, would have benefits for changing the workplace culture.

### 5.2.3 *Childcare/maternity policy recommendations*

- Enhanced measures are needed to support women re-entering the workplace after childbirth, including extended and sustained funding of networking, coaching and mentoring schemes (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005)

- the possibility of providing childcare through a public-private partnership should be explored (Forum on the Workplace of the Future 2005)
- employers should be allowed to offset expenditure on childcare facilities or services against tax. Expenditure could take the form of facilities, vouchers or direct subsidisation of childcare places for their workers (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare 1999)
- childminders should be allowed to avail of public subsidies in return for regulation of the industry through quality controls of their services (OECD 2003)
- child allowance benefit payments and/or future increases in this payment could be linked - at least in part - to using childcare facilities/services (OECD 2003)
- if greater quality controls were put in place, subsidies for childcare facilities could be linked to the quality of the service, which would provide incentives to providers to achieve national standards of care and maintain quality (OECD 2003).

On a practical level, international literature demonstrates possible strategies to be adopted in Ireland. For example, in Scotland new childcare initiatives include the introduction of a Childcare Tax Credit, the setting up of Childcare Partnerships in all local authority areas and the launch of a free-phone national helpline in every local authority area to give parents childcare information and link them to services (Jackson in Childminding Ireland 2004a: 8).

The participants in the study by Coveney *et al.* (1998) outlined their needs in relation to childcare, which can be seen as recommendations for future policy as they stated that these did not exist for them:

- access to safe, secure childcare that is of high quality and that stimulates and engages children, so that the child's development is being aided
- affordable subsidised childcare facilities, which are located either close to where they live or are workplace facilities
- flexible childcare arrangements for children of every age, thus eliminating competing timetables of childcare and employment and ensuring that children do not face a daily succession of minders
- locally accessibly after-school care for children of school-going age
- where there are community facilities, there should be offers of places for children that are non-discretionary, with membership of management committees open to the local community
- assurance that their children are content with the childcare environment so that parents can feel content about leaving them there
- childcare arrangements that do not incur great family obligations.

### 5.3 Recommendations for further research - questions and methodologies

Recommendations for further research on work-life balance in Ireland are outlined by the official website for these policies in Ireland - [www.familyfriendly.ie](http://www.familyfriendly.ie). They argue that more research is needed in the following areas to strengthen knowledge in an Irish context:

- a clear overview of family-friendly work arrangements in Ireland that draws together previous studies on specific aspects of these policies, such as childcare, and their effect on small and medium sized enterprises
- more practical guidelines on how to implement, manage and monitor work-life balance policies in different organisations
- detailed investigation of the experiences of job sharers on a national basis, given the fact that they reported higher stress levels in the study by the NCPP (2003)
- further case studies undertaken in Ireland to show the advantages and disadvantages experienced by employers that have implemented work-life balance policies
- further research on the 'long-hours culture' in Ireland, specifically on the correlations between working long hours and the problems of negative stress
- more research on management personnel who avail of flexible working arrangements in order to assess their career progression in light of their working habits
- more detailed research on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of specific flexible working arrangements, as the literature so far has tended to treat them in general terms. This would be helpful in order to assess what arrangements are needed in individual cases, particularly by specific groups, such as lone parents, people with disabilities, and non-nationals
- further research on the changing roles of men and women in the workplace and how their needs can be met. There is also a need for research on gender divisions in domestic responsibilities and whether flexible working patterns either change or reinforce traditional gender roles and divisions
- further EU comparative studies which match the statutory and non-statutory workplace arrangements across member states.

All of these suggestions would be fruitful to follow up in further research, either through case studies of individual workplaces, where the policies are being assessed, or through pilot projects, where there is an emphasis on specific needs to be met in the workplace. Specific questions on attitudes to working parents, or attitudes to crisis pregnancy could be included in order to address some of the gaps identified in this report.

The following suggested studies are based on each the above recommendations:

### **Study 1**

A series of case studies of a range of organisations that have implemented work-life balance initiatives to discover their positive and negative experiences. This would build on work previously undertaken through a case study model. It could perhaps follow organisations that participated in earlier studies in order to provide a longitudinal perspective on work-life balance initiatives in Irish organisations.

### **Study 2**

A review of guidelines and recommendations for enterprise in relation to implementing work-life balance policies in individual organisations. The aim would be to produce a comprehensive guide to how these policies can be achieved, which would cover the

entire process from planning and consultation to management and appraisal of flexibly working employees. The guide could comprise research literature on business benefits, as well as advice on potential pitfalls.

### Study 3

A quantitative study on the long-hours culture as an endemic feature of Irish workplaces. The sample would be stratified by the following variables:

- age
- occupation
- status/position
- gender
- earnings
- parental status.

The study would survey the experiences and attitudes of an equal number of men and women in order to elucidate any gender differentiation in experiences of the long hours expected in many organisations. Differences between parents and non-parents would also be highlighted, as well as between mothers and fathers.

### Study 4

A joint quantitative and qualitative study on the success of specific flexible working policies, and in what ways these policies have been successful. The quantitative element would address, among other issues:

- the incidence/rate of implementation of each of the different types of flexible working arrangement
- the take-up rates of each type, with results disaggregated by gender and parental status
- whether or not access is determined formally or informally.

The qualitative element would address specific groups of workers, i.e. working mothers, working fathers, lone parents, non-nationals and those with a disability. Qualitative work could be undertaken in focus groups or individual interviews with each cohort. Results would highlight specific policies that are successful, and others that are not. It would also highlight whether the policies are meeting the needs of many different types of workers or not. The literature already highlights the fact that many experience negative stress from working long hours, but it is necessary to have a more complete analysis of the effects of long working hours on different types of employees. An important factor to consider is whether the longer working hours are expected as part of the standard working week, or if they are remunerated through pay and/or extra holiday entitlements. This factor may influence the experience and attitude towards long hours by workers.

### Study 5

An attitudinal survey on whether or not flexible working policies reinforce traditional gender roles at work and at home. The research suggests that more women than men avail of flexible working arrangements in order to cope with their caring and family responsibilities. Added to this is the lack of statutory provision of paternity leave and the limited and ad hoc private provision of this by employers. Evidence is needed of the

extent to which this consolidates traditional norms of caring roles. Particular attention must be paid to workplaces that offer paternity leave for childbirth, and promote flexible working for male employees. This would allow greater evidence in order to determine whether or not these practices encourage more equal caring roles in the home. Two groups would be needed for the study: working parents in different organisations that currently have flexible working arrangements and working parents who do not have these policies.

The study could take one of three forms:

- a quantitative questionnaire study that allows for the analysis of attitudinal responses through carefully constructed questions
- a qualitative focus group/semi-structured personal interview study
- a mixed-method study that administers a questionnaire within a focus group, or administers a questionnaire remotely to a selected sample.

Questions/issues that need to be addressed would include:

- take-up of flexible working arrangements where available
- reasons why they are / are not availed of where they are available
- desire for flexible working by parents whose workplaces do not have such policies
- time use data on caring/domestic responsibilities by each type of parent.

### Study 6

National questionnaire to all employers in small and medium sized enterprises to assess their experience of flexible working policies or, if they do not have experience, their attitude to them. Specific issues to be addressed would be:

- their perception of their role in helping employees achieve work-life balance
- their knowledge of needs of their employees in relation to work-life balance
- their experience of implementing flexible working measures in terms of cost, administration, and organisation
- their needs in terms of support for implementing and sustaining work-life balance arrangements.

### Study 7

A European comparative study on statutory and non-statutory entitlements to work-life balance measures. This would constitute a cross-national comparative assessment of legal rights to measures that promote work-life balance as well as the extent to which employees experience extended entitlements in their individual workplaces. This could build on previous work, for example, by Fine-Davis *et al.* (2004) or the OECD (2003). It could also produce new data through a case study approach, either of organisations with branches in different countries, or similar sector organisations, so that comparisons can be made across countries.

From the literature review more generally, it is proposed that further specific studies are needed that would examine the following:

- The different experiences of work-life balance policies in companies that have either a formal or informal policy on the provision of flexible working arrangements. The literature suggests that take-up is higher where policies are formalised and embedded in the structure of the organisation. The extent to which this is true in Ireland needs to be further explored.
- The experiences of those employees who do not currently have children. As indicated, little is known about the work-life balance needs of those in the workplace who are not parents, nor about their experience of accessing such working arrangements. This cohort may also plan to have a family in the future, or may face unplanned reproductive choices, and the study could elicit whether or not flexible working arrangements would be an influential factor in reproductive decision-making. An insight into their attitudes and experiences of work-life balance policies would assess whether these policies have been successful or not in including all workers, and not just working parents. The study would also need to sample those working non-parents that do not currently have access to flexible working policies in order to assess the demand among this cohort for work-life balance policies, and what specific policies would benefit them best. Results would be expected to be diverse, but trends in needs could be established which would be useful to enterprises with a young and/or non-parent demographic in their workforce.

These suggested topics for future research would go some way to closing knowledge gaps on work-life balance, workplace culture and maternity/childcare issues. They would particularly address cohorts that have been previously neglected in studies on these areas. Also, they propose specific research questions that must be posited in order to elicit more precise information. The literature review demonstrates that while much research has been produced on the three thematic areas, there is also a great deal of research that needs to be undertaken to extend our knowledge in a detailed and nuanced manner of these complex issues, particularly in relation to those individuals facing unplanned reproductive choices.

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## Appendix 1. Glossary of terms

Adoptive leave	Leave for an eligible employee adopting a child
Annualised hours	An employee will have a defined number of hours per year. Working time can be scheduled around a number of core days or hours that must be worked. Working time can be adjusted to meet business demands
Banking of hours	This means time worked in addition to normal working time can be banked and taken as leave at the end of a period, usually between 4 and 6 weeks. There are usually limitations on how much time can be banked and when the leave must be taken
Bereavement leave	Leave given on the death of an immediate family member
Career break	A period of leave agreed by both the employer and employee for a specified period, generally unpaid
Carer's leave	An employee is entitled to unpaid leave to personally care for a person full-time. All entitlements are governed by the Carer's Leave Act (2001)
Compassionate leave	Leave given to an employee for personal reasons
Compressed hours	Standard amount of hours worked over fewer days
E Working	Forms of flexible working that utilise technology and telecommunications to conduct work outside the workplace
Flexitime	An employee's starting and finishing time are made flexible within certain core hours
Force majeure	A legal entitlement to emergency leave to deal with urgent family crises
Job sharing	An arrangement which divides one full-time job between two workers with the responsibilities and time divided between them
Job splitting	An arrangement similar to job sharing which divides specific tasks between two workers, giving them separate responsibilities
Long-hours culture	Working longer than standard hours in order to progress or impress in the workplace

Maternity leave	Statutory leave given at the time of childbirth to a mother
Paternity leave	Leave given at the discretion of the employer at the time of the birth of their child
Parental leave	Statutory leave of 14 weeks for parents to look after a child under 8 years or up to 16 years in the case of children with disabilities
Part-time work	Where an employee works less than full-time working hours in their organisation
Presenteeism	Refers to an employee being valued for time spent at work rather than outputs whilst there
Sabbatical	Period of absence from employment which may or may not be paid, usually calculated by length of service
Teleworking	Similar term to E Working - using technologies for flexible location working
Term time working	Employees work only during school terms in order to fit in with childcare demands. Their pay can be given on a pro rata basis or spread out over the yearly pay period
Work-life balance	A balance between work and domestic responsibilities

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