

**EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS
FOLLOWING
MATERNITY LEAVE**

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ABSTRACT

Employment among women with children has grown rapidly in the United Kingdom since the early 1980s. Nonetheless, in this society motherhood remains the major correlate of female labour force participation and women, on becoming a mother, typically make a decision as to whether they should leave employment, interrupting their working lives to raise children, or continue in employment throughout the childbearing years.

The aims of this study were to explore the decisions made by women on the transition to motherhood, and to gain an understanding of why some women continue in employment while others do not.

The research for the study was based on interviews with a sample of two hundred and two women, who were first time mothers, taking maternity leave from employment in the health service in Northern Ireland. The interviews were structured around eight propositions suggesting a probabilistic relationship between various characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood of a woman continuing in employment. The study found that almost three-quarters of women intended to return to work. Analysis of the data indicated that for the majority, the co-existence and interaction of three variables - high earnings, availability of childcare and a care-sharing partner - influenced the likelihood of a woman continuing in employment.

The conclusions drawn are that a woman's circumstances, in particular her income level, the availability of childcare, and the support of her partner, will largely determine the choice-set available to her, and hence may restrict the role which personal preference can play in her employment decision following maternity leave.

The policy implications of the study's findings are considered, and a range of policy responses proposed, with a view to enhancing the choices available to both men and women for combining parenthood and employment.

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INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with the employment decisions made by women when they become mothers. It is based upon research carried out in the period 1992-1995 amongst women taking maternity leave from employment in the National Health Service in Northern Ireland.

In the United Kingdom responsibility for childrearing remains the major correlate of female labour force participation. This suggests that for the majority of women there is a decision to be made as to whether they should interrupt their working lives to raise children and leave employment on becoming a mother, or continue in employment throughout the childbearing years, returning to work after a period of maternity leave for the birth of each child. The significance of that decision for the individual, in terms of her lifetime earnings potential, occupational mobility and career prospects is not in doubt, and has been graphically illustrated by a number of studies. Joshi and Davies, (1993), for example, found that a woman with two children and a 'typical' British employment history, foregoes earnings of £249,000 or some 57% of her possible lifetime earnings (at 1991 prices). The work of Ginn and Arber (1993) suggests that the effects of such a decision are not confined to a woman's working life but go beyond it in terms of access to pensions. Women's financial wellbeing in later life depends largely on their ability to accumulate pension entitlements. Such entitlements typically have requirements for length of service and minimum hours which rule out those who have discontinuous

working lives and/or those who go back to work on a part-time basis. Hence in Britain only 19% of women part-time workers belong to a pension scheme compared with 55% of women working full-time (OPCS, 1994). The long-term significance of women's employment decisions should not be underestimated. As Beck (1992) comments "even where the word 'decisions' is too grandiose because neither consciousness nor alternatives are present, the individual will have to 'pay for' the consequences of decisions not taken" (p.135).

It is not just individuals, however, and not just women, who may be affected by the consequences of employment decisions made at this time of transition to motherhood. The maintenance, or otherwise, of women's position in the labour market, influences the overall income pattern of families, and households with children, more generally. Differentiation among women is likely to translate into increasing inequalities between families. In a society with an increasing number of dual-earner households, one-earner households are at a financial disadvantage, and economic and social inequalities may be accentuated by women's employment decisions.

Such decisions are rarely simple or straightforward however. They depend on many factors; an individual's attitudes; the attitudes of their partner and the wider society; the choice set which is available to each individual; and the opportunity structures and constraints with which she is faced. The aims of this study - to explore the employment decisions made by women on becoming mothers, and to gain an understanding of why some women return to work, while others do not - are therefore approached in two ways. Firstly, the study seeks to achieve an understanding of the decision from the perspective of the decision-maker; the ways in which she makes active and conscious choices, and

how the meanings which she gives to her situation and her interpretations of the world shape those choices. But decisions also need to be set in the context of the events and the ideological and structural forces which constrain individuals as they construct their lives and define their situations. Hence the study adopts a second approach, which is to gain an understanding of women's decisions through an exploration of the opportunities and constraints, both structural and ideological, upon them for combining employment and motherhood.

In adopting such approaches it attempts a considerably more comprehensive analysis of women's employment decisions than work previously undertaken. Whilst a number of studies of women's employment have considered the decisions which are made and have sought to make sense of why mothers work, they have suffered from a series of limitations. In particular, they have tended to focus on a rather limited range of variables, often determined by the discipline of the researcher. Economists, for example, have typically focused on earnings, earnings potential and household financial management as determinants of mothers' employment. Layard (1978) from his analysis of General Household Survey (GHS) data suggests that the level of a man's income will determine whether his wife participates in the labour force, with wives of high earning men least likely to take up paid employment. From the same data analysis, however, Layard also concludes that wives with high earnings potential themselves are more likely to work. This conclusion is supported by more recent studies; Waldfogel (1993) for example, using National Child Development Study (NCDS) data, investigates wage differentials among women related to family status, the so-called "family gap", as well as wage inequality between men and women, the "gender gap", and concludes that whilst more work experience leads to higher wages it is also the case that "higher wages induce

higher labour force participation", (p.20) and "higher wage women are ... more likely to have children and be observed working" (p.21). Morris (1990) suggesting that the household system of financial management may be the determining factor in mothers' labour market participation concludes that "A full appreciation of the decision to enter employment, requires a consideration of the use of the married woman's wage and of her access to her husband's wage, both of which may be shaped by the way in which the household manages financial matters" (p.117).

Non-economists on the other hand, often social psychologists, sociologists and those concerned with social policy, typically focus on women's attitudes to employment, the meaning of work for social identity, and the significance of childcare provision, to the exclusion of other determinants such as pay and household finances. Dex (1988), for example, concluded that the majority of working women gave priority to work as a means of achieving personal development goals or as a way of achieving satisfying social relationships, and these conclusions are supported by others, such as Agassi (1982), whose detailed comparison of women's and men's attitudes and orientations to work in Israel, Germany and USA suggests that women who work do so because they see work as a source of challenge and of personal freedom. In an explanation of women's, and particularly mothers', decisions to engage in paid employment Moss (1988) suggests that in the absence of affordable quality childcare, most mothers have no real choice about returning to work or remaining at home.

A further limitation lies in the fact that, whilst a number of the studies (Martin and Roberts 1984; McRae, 1991; Kremer and Montgomery 1993) acknowledge the complexity of the decision-making process, most have failed to explore that complexity

and instead have attempted to reduce explanations of employment decisions to the level of women's "reasons". These "reasons" are often in fact responses to direct questions. But decision-making of this kind cannot be adequately captured by the straight forward question "Why do you work"?

The present study starts from the premise that this is a complex issue and seeks to explore that complexity in an analysis which moves from individuals to their location within households and partnerships and beyond to the wider society, exploring the ways in which actors construct their own beliefs and actions and the ways in which significant others and wider social forces act upon them (Dawe, 1970).

In so doing it is hoped to contribute some new information and understanding to the growing body of knowledge about motherhood and employment. However, the contribution of this study comes also from its focus upon the employment decision *per se*, and from the fact that it concentrates upon women at a transitional, rather than an established, point in their lives. As such it differs from a number of other studies in this area which have looked at the consequences of women's employment decisions following maternity leave, rather than the decision itself, how it was made, and the factors influencing it. Brannen and Moss (1991) for example, focus primarily upon management of the dual-earner lifestyle, while studies in the United States (eg. Hertz, 1985, Hochschild, 1989) have been concerned with the impact which women's employment may have upon domestic labour and household relationships.

This study focuses upon women working in the health service. The reasons underlying this choice of location are explored in some detail in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 4. For

the present it will suffice to say that the NHS is the largest employer of women in Europe, and as such provides a fertile area for the study of many aspects of women's employment. The health service is attractive, more specifically, however because it is unique in affording an opportunity to study a population of women who are homogeneous, in terms of their conditions of employment, yet at the same time heterogeneous, not only because of their personal preferences and circumstances, but also in the range of jobs they do, the levels at which they are employed, and the earnings which they enjoy.

There have been several studies concerned with women employed in the NHS which have made important contributions to the body of knowledge about female labour in this area. The present study differs from these, however, in a number of respects and, as such, seeks to make its own unique contribution. Firstly, most have been occupational studies, focused on particular staff groupings. Davies (1995) for example, studies the nursing profession; Homans (1989) looks at laboratory workers and Crompton and Sanderson (1986) at pharmacists. As such they offer only partial accounts of the experiences of women in general in the health service. The present study, whilst not wholly representative of health care occupations, nonetheless provides a broader picture of women in the health service, rather than in specific work situations. It also differs from other health service studies in that it focuses, not upon women employees in general, but upon women who have recently made the transition to motherhood.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Increased Labour Force Participation

The overall economic activity rate for women of working age in the UK is currently more than 71 % (Employment Gazette, April 1993). Women account for 49% of the UK workforce. Participation in paid work is now the experience of most women, including the majority of those married or co-habiting, 56% of whom under the age of 60 are in paid employment. It is clear that in contrast to the post-war era when marriage *per se* was the watershed in women's employment careers, childbirth is now the most significant correlate of labour force participation. But even that relationship has changed. As early as 1980 the Women and Employment Survey (WES), indicated that whilst almost all women who were mothers had a break in the continuity of their employment following the birth of children (Martin and Roberts, 1984) - only 4% of mothers who participated in the survey had remained in continuous employment throughout their working lives - changes were taking place in the effect which having children might have on women's labour market activity. By focusing on the employment histories of different cohorts of women in the survey, they found that successive cohorts were returning to work sooner after having a child, and that increasingly women were returning to work between births. In the light of these findings, they argued that the bimodal pattern of participation, which was previously assumed to characterise patterns of labour force participation over women's working lives, specifically work after school followed by a period of economic inactivity until the last child is of school age (the M-shaped activity curve), was "increasingly a less accurate description of how a large group of women behave in the labour market" (page 187).

Evidence of an acceleration during the 1980s in the trend towards early return to work following childbirth came from the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) study undertaken in 1988 (McRae, 1991) which found that 45 % of women who had worked during pregnancy were in work within eight or nine months after the birth. This contrasted sharply with an earlier PSI study (Daniel, 1980) which showed that, in 1979, of all women who worked during pregnancy 24% were in work again within eight or nine months.

This continuing trend towards an increase in the proportion of mothers, and in particular mothers with young children, participating in paid work has been noted too by Cohen (1990) in her report to the European Commission's Child Care Network. Comparing employment rates throughout the UK in 1985 and 1988 she found that the percentage of mothers of pre-school children in employment increased from 29% in 1985 to 37% in 1988, and for mothers with children aged 5-9 from 45% in 1985 to 53% in 1988. However, crude labour force participation rates are an inadequate measure for examining changes in employment patterns and behaviour. The most obvious factor masked by labour force participation rates is the role of part-time and other "non-standard" forms of work in contributing to the participation rate. Cohen, for example, found that full-time employment for mothers with children in both age groups was considerably less common than part-time employment, with just under 11 % of women with children under 5 and nearly 14 % with children 5-9 in full-time work. In the UK 46% of all employed women and 53% of employed married women work part-time. Even more significantly perhaps, by 1990 43.7% of women working part-time in manual jobs worked less than 16 hours a week, hence falling under the hours and earnings thresholds necessary to secure access to many welfare benefits.

When viewed in a European context this predominance of part-time working is particularly striking. Between 1985 and 1991 the UK experienced one of the fastest rates of employment growth in the European Union among women with children under 10 years of age. The UK however, still has the second lowest level of full-time employment among mothers with children under 10 years (16% compared to the 31% average for the EU) and the highest level of part-time employment among mothers with this younger group of children (at 35% equal with the Netherlands and some way ahead of Denmark 28% and Germany 24%). UK part-timers also work on average much shorter hours than part-timers in other countries (Source: EC Childcare Network, 1991).

A detailed explanation of the increase in numbers of "working mothers" is beyond the immediate scope of this study. Suffice to say that it can be attributed to a wide ranging combination of economic, social and political factors, amongst them the shift away from full-time jobs in manufacturing towards part-time jobs in the service sector and the establishment of both a high status and a low skill subsection within that sector. Virtually all employment growth in recent years has come through the creation of part-time jobs - jobs which are overwhelmingly taken up by women, many of them mothers combining paid employment with domestic responsibilities. In the 1980s women held 75% of unskilled service jobs in the UK. Further factors influencing women's employment opportunities over the past two decades have been their increasing share of professional and higher level qualifications and the continuing evolution of occupational structures away from partly skilled manual jobs towards higher level white collar professional and managerial jobs, which women are increasingly qualified to aspire to and to hold. Over the past two decades too sex discrimination and equal pay legislation has been introduced, strengthened and amended. The existence, since 1975, of a statutory maternity leave

scheme is clearly not, on its own, a sufficient explanation of the increase in working mothers. The scheme did give those women who qualify the right to return to employment on a full-time basis after a maximum period of 40 weeks maternity leave, and did provide for paid leave for 18 of the 40 weeks at a rate of 9/10 of pay for 6 weeks, followed by a lower flat rate of pay for 12 weeks. However, until 1994 and the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act (1993) only those employed full-time on a continuous basis for 2 years with the same employer were eligible under the scheme, and a number of studies (e.g. Daniel, 1980; Kremer and Montgomery, 1993) suggest that in practice only about half of the UK's working women qualified, with part-time workers particularly disadvantaged in this respect.

The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 has brought changes in the law governing women's maternity rights. All pregnant employees irrespective of their length of service and terms and conditions of employment are now entitled to fourteen weeks Statutory Maternity Leave. During this time all non-earnings contractual benefits must be continued i.e. all benefits except wages or salary. This is a significant improvement in provisions for those working part-time. Those who have two years continuous full-time service or five years continuous part-time service (8-16 hours per week) are still entitled to an additional period of maternity leave up to a maximum of 40 weeks, 29 coming after childbirth. In relation to maternity pay the legislation provides for Statutory Maternity Pay to be paid for an eighteen week period with the first six weeks being paid at 90% of the woman's average earnings, and the remaining twelve weeks at a flat rate related to statutory sick pay, currently £52.50 per week. However, whilst all pregnant employees are now entitled to Statutory Maternity Leave, not all are entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay. To qualify for this women must earn enough to pay

national insurance contributions (the threshold is currently £57 per week) and have been in employment for at least 26 weeks.

Whilst the explanation is undoubtedly complex, the evidence is that women are increasingly likely to be employed throughout their child-bearing years and to return to work sooner after the birth of a child. However, responsibility for child rearing remains the major correlate of female labour force participation and the majority of mothers of young children still do not go out to work. Two-thirds of married women with pre-school age children do not have paid jobs (McRae, 1991) and 53% of women continue to take a break of at least one year out of employment (Kempeneers and Lelievre, 1991). In the UK women's economic activity rates are still significantly influenced by the age of youngest child, rising from 46.5% of women whose youngest child is under two years to 76% when children are aged seven to fourteen years (Eurostat. Community Labour Force Survey, 1991). This is in stark contrast to most other EU countries (Germany being the only other exception) where the age of the youngest child makes little difference to employment rates.

By and large it is assumed that men will be in employment throughout their adult life, albeit increasingly on a variety of terms and conditions as part of either core or peripheral workforces. No such assumptions are made regarding women's working lives and in order to understand the decisions of women, to either continue in or leave employment after childbirth, it is first necessary to examine what women have "normally" done and what they have been expected to do.

The Literature on First Time Mothers and Employment

It is widely acknowledged that women's working lives are fundamentally influenced by the composition of their family and their stage in the lifecourse. It is acknowledged also that, unlike earlier times when the key marker was marriage itself, today it is the birth of the first child which signals a major change in waged work (eg. Martin and Roberts 1984, Arber and Gilbert, 1992).

In a literature concerned with women and employment and, more specifically, with motherhood and employment, it is therefore somewhat surprising that so little attention has in fact been directed towards first time mothers, and to how women's experiences of employment are affected by the transition to motherhood.

In order to appreciate the contribution of the present study, which has as its focus the employment decisions of first-time mothers, it is, however, important to see it in the context of the literature on women in employment and, more specifically the literature regarding the relationship between motherhood and employment.

In any review of this nature the starting point will almost inevitably be the 1980 Women and Employment Survey (WES) carried out for the Department of Employment and Office of Population and Censuses and Surveys by Martin and Roberts (Martin and Roberts 1984). This has come to be regarded as the first truly comprehensive account of women and employment in the United Kingdom. By focusing specifically on women's work, both paid and unpaid, and by framing categories and questions which took account of women's experiences, this interview based study of 5588 women played a significant

role in increasing understanding of women's position in employment, and the complex range of factors influencing women's participation in paid work. Hence, although the Women and Employment Survey was not a study concerned specifically with motherhood and employment, it has relevance for the present study, whose primary concern is to explore that complex range of factors influencing the participation in paid work of women who have recently made the transition to motherhood. The WES was in fact the first study to document changes, which were taking place as early as 1980, in the effect which having children might have on a woman's labour market activity. As noted above (p.13) by focusing on the employment histories of different cohorts of women in the survey, Martin and Roberts found that, although almost all women who were mothers had discontinuous employment patterns, successive cohorts were returning to work sooner after having a child, and that increasingly women were returning to work between births.

Since the Women and Employment Survey there has been no shortage of analysis and commentaries on women's employment; eg. Dex 1984, 1988; Beechey 1986, 1989; Hakim 1991, 1996; Harrop and Moss 1995; Joshi 1984, 1987, 1993; some of which have used data from the WES, or other large scale data sets such as, for example, the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) and many of which have taken official statistics and government surveys, such as the Labour Force Surveys as their most significant sources. Primary research, which is dedicated exclusively to women in employment, and specifically to motherhood and employment is much less easy to locate. That which has been undertaken has often been directed towards single issues such as childcare or family-friendly employment practices (eg. Moss 1988; Cohen 1990). There are exceptions, however, and it is to those exceptions one of which focuses specifically upon first time mothers , that attention is now directed.

The only piece of comprehensive research on women and employment to be undertaken in Northern Ireland (the setting for the present study) was commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission (Northern Ireland) in 1990, and produced the Women's Working Lives Survey (WWLS) (Kremer and Montgomery 1993). Based on a representative sample of 1000 women of working age in Northern Ireland, the broad aims of the project were to explore the characteristics of women's employment; the influence of the lifecycle on women's movement in and out of employment, and the influence of domestic life on women's participation in paid work. Although, again, this was not specifically a study of motherhood and employment, its aims were such as to make it clearly relevant to the present study which is concerned with the factors influencing women's employment decisions on the transition to motherhood.

The WWLS documents the significance which motherhood in general has for women's labour market participation in Northern Ireland. The economic activity rate for women with no children under the age of 16 was ten percentage points higher than that of women with children under 16 - 65% compared to 55%. Thirty-nine percent of women in employment classified themselves as working part-time and the age of the youngest child was significant with regard to type of employment. Sixty-one per cent of all working women were in full-time employment, but only 35% of those whose youngest child was aged 5 - 10 were working full-time compared to 54% of those whose youngest child was 0 - 4. This result may be surprising at first sight, however it is relatively easy to obtain childcare facilities through the extended family system in Northern Ireland, compared to making arrangements for older children after school and in school holidays.

Whilst the WWLS is a "broad brush" survey of women's working lives and as such is

not concerned to provide a detailed exploration of why mothers do, or do not, continue in employment, nonetheless it does suggest some "reasons" why some women decide to interrupt their careers to raise children. For some, it suggests, this decision may reflect personal beliefs about a woman's primary role as mother and homemaker; for others it may reflect their partner's wishes, and for others their choice may be a pragmatic response to a shortage or absence of affordable childcare, Northern Ireland being the most disadvantaged region within the UK in relation to childcare services (Kremer and Montgomery 1993, p.238-244).

Whilst the findings of the WWLS are of interest then, and indeed provide much of the context for the present study, it is not, however, a study of the relationship between motherhood and employment, still less of first time motherhood. For such studies we must look to the wider GB context, in which two pieces of primary research are of particular relevance. These are, firstly, the PSI study of Maternity Rights (McRae 1991), which is concerned with mothers who have taken maternity leave from employment, regardless of birth order or number of children, and, secondly, the project undertaken at the Thomas Coram Research Unit in the first half of the 1980s (Brannen 1987, 1992; Brannen and Moss 1991) which focuses upon first-time mothers and specifically upon mothers who return to employment following the birth of a first child.

The Policy Studies Institute study of Maternity Rights in Britain (McRae 1991) largely replicated a previous study undertaken in 1979 (Daniel 1980). It took the form of a postal survey of almost 5,000 women who had babies in December 1987 or January 1988, (and a smaller survey of 500 employers) with the aims of examining the operation and effects of maternity rights provisions and of investigating women's employment

experiences over childbirth. As such it differs from the present study in both scope and in focus. Nonetheless the findings of the PSI study are of some relevance to the present project, in particular in terms of findings specifically related to first-time mothers, who comprised almost half (48%) of McRae's sample, and also in terms of its findings on factors which were significant for women's return to work behaviour. The main findings of the study were that 45% of women who had been in work during pregnancy were back at work within 8-9 months of the birth, and a further 20% were seeking work. This compared to figures of 25% and 14% in 1979. More than 20% of those who had worked full-time before the birth had returned to full-time work. Women who had worked in the public sector were twice as likely as other women to return to work, with over 60% returning. First time mothers were considerably less likely to be back at work 8-9 months after the birth than those with a second or further child. Just 40% of first-time mothers returned compared to 56% of those with a second, and 55% of those with a third or further child. First-time mothers were, however, slightly more likely to be back in full-time work, some 16% compared to 14% of those with two children and 12% of those with three or more children. These differences in rates of return between first time and other mothers McRae claims "reflect decisions taken earlier by these women to combine paid employment with being a mother, and the likelihood of such women having already in place arrangements to facilitate their continuing employment" (p.229).

Such findings provided some of the rationale for the decision to focus upon first-time mothers in the present study. It seemed that the majority of maternity leave applicants would, in any case, be first-time mothers - the PSI study found that 78% of mothers having their first child had been in employment twelve months before the birth, compared with about one third of women who had a second or subsequent child. The PSI study

also seemed to suggest (from the findings noted above) that the range of factors potentially influencing the decisions of first time mothers would be likely to be wider than that faced by an "experienced" mother. It seemed likely that, as discussed in Chapter 3, those making the decision to return to work following childbirth for the first time, would be confronting both ideological and structural factors, which mothers with more than one child might be assumed to have faced, and dealt with, first time around.

The PSI study's findings on factors statistically related to women's return to work behaviour were of relevance to the present study also, and indeed contributed to the hypotheses, around which the present study has been structured. These factors related to:

- occupational level (those in professional and associate professional occupations were most likely to return)
- educational qualifications (those with qualifications above 'A' level were most likely to return)
- contractual maternity pay (75% of those on CMP were returning)
- type of employer (60% of public sector employees were returning)

For all these reasons the PSI study (McRae 1991) was of relevance to the present project. As indicated above, however, its specific focus upon the operation and effects of maternity rights provisions, and its interest in all mothers, regardless of birth order, made it very different to this study.

More akin to the focus and interests of the present work was the longitudinal study undertaken at the Thomas Coram Research Unit (Brannen 1987, 1992; Brannen and Moss

1991) in the first half of the 1980s. This was a study of first-time mothers in 185 households, who intended to resume their former employment on a full-time basis following maternity leave. As such it was also a study of dual-earner households. The approach and focus of this work was very different to that of the PSI study, not only in its exclusive concern with first-time mothers, but also in its interest in women's perceptions as much as in "what" their experiences had been of employment over childbirth. The Thomas Coram study set out to analyse the perspectives of women returners with respect to three central and interrelated issues:

- the significance women attach to their earnings;
- their responses to what was still, an unequal division of childcare and domestic work in the household;
- their social construction of the maternal role. (Brannen 1992, p.54)

In so doing it sought to explore how far the women's definitions of their situations conformed to, and conflicted with, dominant ideologies. It was concerned to examine the extent to which changes in public practices affect the ways in which ideologies are played out in private relationships, in families which deviate from the statistically and ideologically normative pattern.

Although here again the focus and scope of the study was rather different, concentrating as it did, primarily on returners, and on the consequences of the return for these dual earner households, rather than upon the decision to return *per se*, nonetheless a number of the findings of the work undertaken by Brannen and Moss were of particular relevance to the present study. In particular women returning to work after maternity leave were,

as in the PSI study, found to differ from non-returners in a number of ways - in age, educational qualifications, occupational status and earnings. Such findings helped to formulate the hypothesis used in the present study that "women with educational qualifications, in higher level occupations and with high earnings potential will be likely to return to work following maternity leave". Brannen and Moss also found that equal attachment to employment does not, as might have been expected, translate into equality in domestic gender roles. Again, this was a finding of some interest to the present study which hypothesised that "the more equal the sharing of childcare and domestic labour within the household, the more likely is a return to work following maternity leave".

From this brief overview of texts relevant to the present study it is clear that, whilst there has been no shortage of commentaries and analyses on women in employment over the past decade, few have focused specifically upon motherhood and employment, and far fewer still upon first-time mothers. This despite a widespread acknowledgement of the significance which the transition to motherhood holds for women's employment, and the acknowledgement too (Brannen 1992) that a key group in any discussion of women's employment is the (small) proportion of women who return to work full-time following the birth of their first child.

It is hoped that the present study may do something to fill this gap and may make a contribution to the body of knowledge and understanding regarding the employment experiences of women when they make the transition to motherhood.

THE APPROACH AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study does not fit readily into a specific theoretical approach any more than most of those described above. It does however endeavour to deal with constraints upon women in combining motherhood and employment, and recognises that such constraints may be material, ideological or institutional. It is concerned also however, with the ways in which actions and decisions are shaped by interpretations of individual situations. Women are portrayed in an active decision-making role rather than as purely passive actors reacting to the tensions and conflicts produced by the various sets of external constraints.

Contribution to Knowledge on Motherhood and Employment

This study contributes to the body of knowledge about motherhood and employment in a number of ways, some of which have been dealt with above (p.11) and in the discussion on methodology (p.113). Broadly it may be said that, in its approach and research design, it addresses the complexity of the issue more effectively than existing analyses, which have tended to reduce explanations of employment decisions to the level of women's "reasons" for working. In this study a series of propositions are examined in order to establish the relationship between a number of variables and the likelihood of a woman returning to work following maternity leave. Since the complexity of the issue is acknowledged, however, it is recognised that no one factor will be, in itself, sufficient to explain the decision which a woman makes regarding employment following childbirth. Hence, discriminant analysis is used to establish the combination of factors which, when interacting, will be most effective in determining the likelihood of a woman returning to

work. The complexity is also explored yet further in a detailed examination of the minority of cases who do not "fit", whose decisions have not been adequately explained by the "ideal" combination of factors suggested by discriminant analysis.

This study makes a further contribution to the body of knowledge on motherhood and employment by its focus upon first-time mothers. As discussed in the review of literature above (p.18-25), it provides an almost unique focus upon this group of mothers in a literature largely concerned with the relationship between motherhood and employment, or more generally women's employment. Whilst some studies (eg. McRae 1991) do recognise that the majority of women taking maternity leave are in any case likely to be first time mothers, they do not acknowledge that the decision-making process is likely to be most complex for such mothers. This is because the range of factors potentially influencing their decisions will generally be wider than that faced by an "experienced" mother. Mothers making the decision to return to work following childbirth for the first time, would be confronting ideological factors related to their own attitudes to work and working mothers, their partners' and employers' attitudes, as well as structural opportunities and constraints. Mothers with more than one child on the other hand might be assumed to have addressed many of these issues "first time round", and therefore to provide a less fruitful source of evidence regarding factors influencing employment decisions. Hence the focus upon first-time mothers further enhances the contribution which this study makes to knowledge and understanding of motherhood and employment.

This is a study of women at a transitional point in their lives and as such it differs from other studies of motherhood and employment which largely focus upon more established patterns in the relationship between the two. The women who took part in this study

were interviewed in or around the fifteenth week of maternity leave, when they had recently made the transition to motherhood and when they had made, but not yet implemented, a decision regarding future employment. As such the study focuses upon a "transition point" in women's lives which was much closer to the decision *per se*, rather than, as a number of other studies have done, upon the consequences of that decision (eg. Hochschild 1989, Brannen and Moss 1991).

Finally, a significant part of the contribution made by this study stems from its focus upon women in the mid-1990s and from its attempt to document the position of women in a changing labour market. While the particular time and place in which a study is set matters for any research, it is especially important given the subject of this work. Much has changed since the other significant studies undertaken in this area, in particular the primary research of Brannen and Moss (1991) which was carried out in the first half of the 1980s, and that of McRae (1991), who surveyed women who had given birth in 1987/88. Since the 1980s, regardless of the ongoing debate as to how to define and quantify female employment (Hakim 1996; Ginn et al 1996), it does seem that women have entered the labour market, in Northern Ireland as elsewhere in the UK, in increasing numbers. But the labour market has itself changed substantially. There has been further decline in traditional manufacturing industries, such as textile and clothing, which in Northern Ireland were the mainstay of much female employment. The growth in service sector employment has also increased; some of which has been in the private sector, at the expense of public sector employment in areas such as health and social services, where the great bulk of the ancillary workforce of cleaning, catering and personal care workers has traditionally been female. There has been a dramatic increase too in the spread of so-called "flexible" patterns of work, namely part-time, fixed-term contract,

casual and seasonal work, much of it undertaken by "peripheral" workforces, predominantly female in form. Such labour market changes have had an impact upon the employment of women, and not least upon women who are mothers. Hence, it is hoped that the present study, located in the 1990s, and in a sector of employment, the NHS, much affected by a number of the changes above, has contributed significantly to the body of knowledge and understanding about motherhood and employment.

Limitations

The approach adopted, and the kind of study which could be undertaken, was however, restricted by limited resources, in terms of finance and time available, and also in terms of the sample which could be achieved. Such restrictions led, as discussed in Chapter 3, to a "snap-shot" of women in or around the fifteenth week of maternity leave. In an ideal situation a longitudinal study might have had some advantages over this approach in that it would have afforded insights into how employment decisions were translated into employment histories. Of particular interest would have been the extent to which those who intended to return to work actually did so; whether they remained in employment beyond the three months required for contractual maternity pay purposes; and the extent to which those who did remain maintained the status of their return; ie. full-time or part-time. It would have been useful also to see whether those who did not intend to return to work following maternity leave remained out of employment for the length of time they anticipated. Such "follow-up" may be possible however in some of the areas for future research suggested in the concluding chapter.

A further limitation of the study may be said to stem from the sample which could be

achieved. This was not wholly representative of health care occupations. In particular low status, low earning occupations such as cleaning and catering were largely unrepresented because of policy changes within the NHS which had led to the privatisation of such services. It is acknowledged that women in such occupations may have made decisions regarding their future employment which may have differed substantially from those of the women in the sample, and for different "reasons".

Given the pace of recent change, and the likely future directions in the health service, however, it may well be that the sample actually achieved, and the behaviour of the sample, does quite closely resemble the evolving profile of the healthcare workforce. That workforce increasingly comprises a core of highly skilled "specialist" employees and a periphery of "contracted out" generalist and ancillary services.

A limitation of any empirical study lies in the fact that the context in which it is undertaken is likely to alter significantly over the period of its duration. During the period of this study, new maternity rights provisions were introduced and statutory employment rights were extended to part-time workers. The pace of change within the health service accelerated as the internal market developed and self-governing trusts became free to employ staff directly and hence shape job descriptions and pay and conditions to suit the business environment. Northern Ireland experienced peace, albeit fleetingly, for the first time in more than a quarter of a century, and with it an improvement in economic and employment conditions. All such changes and developments, in their different ways, are likely to impact upon women's experience of work and opportunities for work, and hence upon the employment decisions made on becoming a mother. Thus, if the study were to be undertaken in this "new" era, its

approach and outcomes might well have been rather different.

OUTLINE

The first two chapters of the thesis between them set the scene for the presentation of the study's findings. The study is structured around a series of propositions suggesting a probabilistic relationship between a number of variables and the likelihood of a woman returning to work following maternity leave. Chapter One introduces the issues underpinning those propositions and provides a brief critical account of existing analyses of mothers' employment decisions, both empirical and theoretical. The second chapter provides the context for the study in economic, social and geographical terms. It examines the factors which set Northern Ireland apart as a location for the study - factors which, whilst they may universally play their part in determining women's employment, here are revealed most starkly and vividly (Kremer and Montgomery, 1993). This chapter also presents the rationale for locating the study within the public health care sector and for choosing health service employees as the subjects.

The research design and methods used in collecting and analysing data are discussed in Chapter Three. The fourth, and fifth chapters are devoted to a description of the sample; to detailed presentation of the research findings; to analysis of the relationship between individual variables and the employment decision, and to discussion of the issues raised by the data. Chapter Five contains information about the patterns of mothers' employment decisions, and about the strategies for motherhood and employment adopted

by the women interviewed. The strategies are discussed in terms of both individual beliefs and preferences, and also the choice-set available to each individual. Hence the study explores not only individual factors but also the context in which the individual's choices are to be exercised, and the influences upon these choices and decisions of relationships within the home, the workplace and the wider society. A number of objectives are pursued in Chapter Six, first, using material from the previous chapter, the relative strength of the relationship between women's employment decisions and the variables suggested by the various theoretical propositions is tested. The interaction between variables relating to individual attitudes, financial and employment conditions, household relationships and the various opportunity structures and constraints, is explored, using the techniques of discriminant analysis. In this chapter also, discriminant analysis is used to determine the combination of variables most likely to successfully predict the likelihood of a return to work following maternity leave. This chapter also explores the degree to which women's employment decisions can be explained by the variables suggested by the eight hypotheses used in this study. The concluding chapter examines the social policy implications of the findings from the study, as well as the implications for men and women, and for employers.

From this study it was hoped to contribute some new information and understanding to the growing body of knowledge about motherhood and employment. This knowledge remains incomplete, however, and hence some possible directions for further research in the area are also discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER I

WHY MOTHERS WORK

In any consideration of why mothers make particular decisions regarding employment it is well to take account of Moss and Fonda's (1980) stricture that they are "individuals with individual preferences, aptitudes and ambitions" (p.198). However, it should be remembered too that they are individuals with their own unique choice-set who are facing their own unique range of opportunities and constraints. In other words what is needed is an exploration of not only individual beliefs and preferences but also the context in which the individual's choices are to be exercised and the influence upon those choices of relationships within the home and the wider society.

Previous studies, some of which are quoted in the introduction, suggest that a number of factors may be especially significant for women's employment decisions following maternity leave. From such studies it is possible to construct a series of propositions suggesting a probabilistic relationship between a number of variables and the likelihood of a woman returning to work following maternity leave. These propositions may then be tested to examine the strength of the various linkages and the relative importance of the variables.

The relevant factors suggested by previous studies are:-

- partner's employment and earnings;
- the individual's employment status, education and earnings;
- household financial arrangements;
- the "meaning" of work to the individual, ie. work orientation;
- partner's attitude and support;
- the degree of sharing of household and caring responsibilities;
- availability of "family-friendly" employment practices;
- availability of child-care facilities.

THE PROPOSITIONS

1. Partner's Employment and Earnings

Women with partners in low-earning and/or "insecure" occupations with frequent job changes, periods of unemployment, the threat of redundancy, etc are more likely to continue in employment than women with partners in high earning and/or secure occupations.

Much of the literature that might help us to assess the strength of the relationships in this proposition is inconclusive - if not in some cases frankly contradictory - suggesting the need for closer scrutiny. The analysis by Layard and his colleagues (1978) of GHS data shows a strong inverse relationship between husband's income and the participation of wives in the labour force. The equation suggests that, other things being equal, a rise of one per cent in the husband's wage will lower the proportion of women working by 0.11 percentage points; or

put another way, if one group of husbands earns 10% more than another the employment rate for wives in the higher earning group will be 1.1% less than in the lower earning group. Moss (1988) comments similarly that in the 1974 Family Expenditure Survey (FES) employment rates for mothers of pre-school children varied from 30% where the husband's income was low (less than £40 pw) to 25% where it was higher (at £60 pw or more). Moss also quotes from the 1972 Voluntary Income Survey, a follow-up to the main Census which indicated that "in all cases economic activity rates for mothers fell as husband's income increased", (p 50) however this relationship was least marked where there was a pre-school child in the family.

Yeandle (1984) in a study of employed mothers aged 25-45 comments on those who took jobs in between the births of at least two of their children that "overwhelmingly the motivation for taking a job at this stage was the need to supplement the family's income. At this point in their lives most of the women were married to men in relatively poorly paid or insecure occupations" (p. 61). And of those who refrained from paid employment until they had completed their families, "most of these women were married to men in white-collar occupations with relatively high earnings" (p. 63).

Dex (1988) in an analysis of WES data found that "the higher is family income unearned by the woman, the lower is her hours of work" (p.140).

Morris (1990) suggests that "a considerable literature has grown up which is concerned to emphasise the importance of wives' earnings in keeping many

households out of poverty, and it has been calculated that the number of households in poverty would increase threefold without this contribution" (p. 120).

It should be noted that Brannen and Moss (1987) found that a significant group of women who had returned to work when their children were very young, - around 25 per cent of those surveyed - said that their money was for "luxuries" or "extras". Whilst superficially this suggests that a considerable proportion of women chose to return to work even though their partner's income was high enough and adequate to basic household needs, Brannen and Moss note that many of those who claimed they were returning for "luxuries" were in fact paying the mortgage. This they interpret as part of the discourse on the unimportance of women's jobs.

Morris and Ruane (1989) also tell us that wives of those in the "highest" income third are more likely to be employed (72%) than those in either the middle (65%) or lowest (45%) income third. This is supported by Rainwater (1984) who suggests that the higher the household income the more likely it is that the wife will be employed, since traditional role definitions play a stronger role in working class (low income) homes, discouraging female labour force participation. But Rainwater also comments that there is no strong relationship between spouse's income and propensity to work and that "wives' decisions to work are not heavily influenced by their husbands' economic circumstances but rather are related to the women's own goals and interests" (page 79).

Evidence regarding the relationship between a partner's income level and the woman's decision to return to work, and the nature of that relationship, is thus inconclusive and the linkages, whether positive or negative, demand further investigation. But overall it would appear that whilst a relationship may exist it cannot be regarded as the whole explanation of women's employment decisions following maternity leave.

A more clear-cut relationship is that which exists between a partner's employment status and a woman's decision to continue in employment. Whilst insecurity and the threat of redundancy may influence women to remain in employment, the evidence strongly suggests that the wives of unemployed men are much less likely to be in employment than are other women, since if a man is unemployed other factors (see below) come into force. As long ago as 1973 Daniel's survey of the unemployed identified the tendency for unemployed men to have non-working wives (Daniel 1974).

A number of studies using FES and GHS data reach this conclusion. In the 1977 GHS, for example, 52% of mothers whose husbands had not been out of work in the previous 12 months had jobs, compared to 35% whose husbands had been unemployed. Studies by Hakim (1982a), Bell and McKee (1985), Morris (1985 and 1987) and Brannen and Moss (1991) all support this conclusion, as does McLaughlin (1993) commenting on the Northern Ireland situation. The association of male unemployment and low economic activity for wives could be due to unemployed men having wives with less marketable skills and being concentrated in areas with poor employment opportunities for both men and

women. However, the overwhelming explanation for this relationship seems to lie in the structure of the British Social Security System, a system which some would claim has had the effect of producing a different basis of citizenship for women, deepening their reliance on men and reinforcing their dependency (Abbot and Bompas, 1943). To quote McLaughlin (1993) "An unemployed husband/partner has the effect of deterring women from remaining in or entering employment . . . Due to the structure and eligibility criteria of the benefit system, the loss of a husband's or partner's job makes the employment of a woman worker more difficult to sustain" (page 142) as husband's benefits are reduced by the amount of their wives' earnings. And as Morris (1990) comments:

"It was only if a woman's wage substantially exceeded the household benefit claim that her assumption of employment . . . was in financial terms a logical outcome" (page 70).

Whilst a full examination of the benefit regulations is outside the scope of this study, given the Northern Ireland context of high levels of male unemployment and in particular of long-term unemployment some explanation of the different rules applying to the short-term as opposed to the long-term unemployed, may be useful.

Providing he has made sufficient social security contributions when in employment an unemployed man can claim Unemployment Benefit for twelve months. The amount of benefit he receives will vary depending on, among other things, whether his wife is employed. However, in calculating the amount of benefit due, a substantial part of the

wife's income is disregarded. Once a worker has exhausted his Unemployment Benefit he transfers to a means tested Income Support benefit and the regulations concerning his wife's income become much less generous. This means that men unemployed for under one year, and therefore qualifying for Unemployment Benefit, are more likely to have a wife in employment. As length of unemployment increases and the family transfers to means tested benefit the woman is less likely to remain in, or continue to seek, employment (Leonard, 1992).

But whilst the evidence suggests that the wives of unemployed men are less likely to be employed than others, the nature of the linkage between partners employment status and women's employment decisions has not been conclusively proven. Leighton (1992), for example, suggests that in middle class families unemployed men were more likely to have wives in employment and also that they were likely to return to the labour market more quickly if their wives were employed.

Hence to the second proposition, that it is a woman's earning potential, her level of education and income and degree of job security which is significant in determining whether she will return to work following the birth of a child.

2. Employment Status, Education and Earnings

Women with educational qualifications, high earnings potential, especially those at higher occupational levels in 'secure' occupations with infrequent job changes, and a considerable length of service with a single employer are more likely to continue in employment than women with low earnings potential

and/or in insecure jobs.

Layard's (1978) analysis of GHS data which showed a relationship between husband's income and the participation of wives in the labour force also identifies other variables affecting married women's employment and usefully quantifies their likely impact. In particular it suggests that the level of a wife's earnings (actual or potential) has twice the impact of a husband's wage but pulls in the opposite direction, ie a rise of 1% in wives' wages will increase the proportion working by 0.22 percentage points. So in the case of a wife with high potential earnings and with a high-earning husband, while his earnings act as a disincentive to her employment, her relatively high earnings potential provides an incentive to her to seek work. Ericksen et al (1979) would support this conclusion linking employment status to earnings potential and suggesting that the higher the wife's employment status, relative to her husband, the more likely she is to work outside the home. Dex's (1988) regression analysis of the WES data found that, the higher a woman's potential earnings, the more she is likely to be oriented towards going out to work. And Dex and Walters (1992) comparing the position in Britain and France, identified a strong pull from French women's greater financial profitability from working which encouraged continuity in employment.

In a recent study Brannen and Moss (1991) also support this hypothesis having found from their own survey that those who returned to work earned on average 8% more than non-returners before going on maternity leave and that returner women earned rather more in relation to their husbands than non-returner women.

Brannen and Moss also comment that "women who took maternity leave, returned to the same jobs and employers on a full-time basis and continued in full-time employment were more likely to have worked in higher status occupations prior to the birth and to have earned more they were also more likely to have been with their employers for longer periods of time before the birth". (p 43).

Glover and Arber (1995), exploring whether the age of the youngest child can be regarded as a key analytical determinant of women's employment status, report that the effect varies by occupational class, being least pronounced in professional groups and most pronounced amongst manual workers. Further evidence comes from the PSI study (McRae, 1991) which found that the main source of variation as regards reasons for returning to work was occupational level and that the number of years women previously spent in employment before a birth also influences their return to work behaviour (p.221). They comment that "women's education, the length of time they had spent in the labour market and in their last job, and the job level attained in their pre-birth job are assumed to represent differing aspects of their 'human capital' investments in their labour market careers" (p.231). The comment regarding the significance of educational level is supported by Harrop and Moss's analysis of the Labour Force Survey 1989 which indicates that the chances of mothers with higher educational qualifications being in full-time work were considerably greater than those of mothers with no educational qualifications (Harrop and Moss, 1995); twice as many mothers with degrees were in full-time employment as mothers with no qualifications. In 1981, 36% of graduate mothers with a pre-school child were in employment compared to 18% of those with no qualifications; by 1989 the employment rates were 63%

and 25 % respectively (p.432). Perhaps most significantly the PSI study was able to measure the impact of women's hourly pay rates upon the chances of their returning to work and this proved to be an even stronger predictor than occupational level. All of which supports the evidence from studies of labour turnover in general that the tendency to leave reduces with length of service (Tavistock 1975) with level of earnings (Lawler 1973) and with promotional opportunity (Porter and Steers 1973).

There is therefore some evidence supporting the conclusion that a woman's earnings potential and level of job security are factors significant in her decision to continue in employment following the birth of a child. They are not however sufficient explanations in themselves. A note of caution, which is not sounded in the studies above is necessary in estimating the importance of income level for the decision, given that the majority of women are low earners relative to their partners. Whilst in 1994, just over 1 in 10 UK working women were in jobs designated as "managers or administrators", 1 in 12 in "professional" jobs and 1 in 10 in associate professional and technical occupations, (OPCS, 1995) these are much smaller proportions than for men. In addition women's pay in such jobs does not on average match that of men, partly because of their lower positions and shorter average working hours. The Northern Ireland Women's Working Lives (Montgomery 1993) survey showed that only 10% of women earn the same as or more than their partner and that of all the women who answered the question on earnings in the survey 69% were earning less than £150 per week, and only 7% more than £300 per week. Blau and Kahn (1992), in particular,

found that the ratio of married mothers' pay to that of married fathers is only 60%, as against the average female/male wage ratio of 64%. Of considerable significance to earnings potential also is the fact that many of those who do continue in employment following maternity leave do so by returning to a job at a lower grade or less well paid in order to secure more convenient hours or patterns of work, often part-time or job-sharing - a change in status which may have grave implications for both short and long-term earnings potential and for career progression. The Joshi and Newell (1986, 1987) studies of the employment histories of women born in 1946 found that around 3 in 10 of those who reported paid work following a first birth had returned to a different type of job which was likely to be worse paid than the one before maternity. Similarly Martin and Roberts (1984) found that 37% of mothers who had made a return to work after a first birth had returned to a lower level of occupation than their previous job. These findings are borne out by studies in the NHS, the largest employer of women in Europe, which suggest that most part-time work in that sector is available only in the more "junior" and least skilled occupations (Meager, Buchan and Rees 1989). For doctors it tends not to be available in the mainstream specialties, surgery in particular, but rather in areas such as family planning and occupational health (Dept of Health 1991) and overall the Equal Opportunities Commission (1992) found that in the NHS "the shortage of part-time posts in middle-ranking and senior positions means that many women with children or other dependents cannot continue their employment at all, or do so in jobs at a lower grade than their qualifications and experience merit" (p.29). All of which would suggest that studies which conclude that women in high earning

occupations prior to maternity leave are more likely to continue in employment may not be accurately representing the position of the many who, because of the constraints of motherhood or the structural constraints of inadequate childcare facilities, may be unable to continue in their previous occupation or position.

A further point to be noted when considering the significance of a woman's earnings potential is not just the level of earnings but what they are to be used for. Brannen and Moss (1991) comment that 'the treatment of earnings as marginal to household resources before a mother leaves work would make a decision to leave easier' (p.84). This raises the issue not only of earnings level but how the earnings are perceived in terms of overall household income. Morris (1984) makes the point that a full appreciation of the decision to enter employment requires a consideration of the use of the woman's wage and her access to her husband's wage, both of which may be shaped by the way in which the household manages financial matters. We cannot necessarily assume that a high income or high earnings potential for either partner necessarily benefits the living standards of the other or of the household as a whole.

Whilst it would appear that the potential to earn a high income in a secure job may be a factor influencing the decision of a woman to continue in employment, a number of the studies in this area are overly simplistic in that they overestimate the significance of that factor without considering the issues raised by the third proposition, ie that the system of financial management used by the household is also significant in determining whether a woman will return to work following the

birth of a first child.

3. Household Financial Arrangements

Women are more likely to return to work if their household uses a joint management system (with joint bank accounts, equal access to finances etc) for financial matters than if their household uses either an 'allowance' or 'whole wage' system.

In order to explore this proposition and its validity some explanation is first required of what is meant by each of these types of household management. Studies of couple's financial management arrangements (eg Pahl 1989) have identified four main types:

- the WHOLE WAGE system is one in which the wage earner(s) hand over to one partner the entire earnings and that partner, usually the woman is responsible both for managing family income and for all household expenditure;
- the ALLOWANCE system involves the main earner, usually the man, handing over a set amount for housekeeping expenditure with the remainder kept by him to cover his own expenditure;

- the JOINT MANAGEMENT or POOLING system is one in which both partners have equal access to all household income and are jointly responsible for management and expenditure from a common pool;
- INDEPENDENT MANAGEMENT is a relatively rare system in which each partner retains a separate income and has designated areas of responsibility for expenditure.

The significance of the type of financial management system used lies in the fact that, as Morris (1990) comments, a woman may be motivated to return to employment by a desire to escape from distributional conflicts, produced by the system and in order to gain some control over income and resources (p 118). This may be the case even for wives of unemployed men who, Leighton (1992) comments, are doubly oppressed by their husband's unemployment if they do not have direct access to financial resources but yet have responsibility for making ends meet on very diminished household assets. Pahl (1980) tells us that "the pooling (joint management) system may be characteristic of the newly married couple who are both earning; this may change to the allowance system when the wife leaves paid employment to look after young children, and change again to a modified pooling system with two earners" (p 330). Similarly Kremer and Montgomery (1993), commenting on evidence from the WWLS in Northern Ireland, suggest that Joint Management is more likely when the woman has a paid job, with a higher percentage of wives receiving an Allowance in male breadwinner couples.

What is important here is the degree to which each system affords partners equal access to household financial resources and a degree of control over such resources.

Vogler (1989) suggests that in households using the Allowance system wives who do not earn may have no personal spending money separate from the housekeeping money which is allocated for collective expenditure. A woman's return to work in such households, whatever their overall income level, may be motivated by a desire for personal spending money, but more often it would appear the motivation is rather to augment an inadequate allocation for housekeeping (Morris 1984). In such cases the argument that women's earnings increase their power in the household is not convincing since the effect may be simply to reduce demands on the man's wage, possibly freeing funds to be used at his discretion. Any recognition of such an effect may, one would assume, reduce the motivation to return to work and hence support the hypothesis above. However, the evidence (Pahl 1980, Wilson 1987 and Vogler 1989) is that the woman's return to work is often accompanied by a shift in the household management system to one of Joint Management or Pooling, a shift which may be motivational in itself, since in this system finances are handled jointly and the woman's wage covers clearly visible items of collective expenditure, for example a mortgage or regular payment of large bills (Morris 1990), hence reducing distributional conflicts.

Much of the evidence in this area, however, suggests that for many women

returners the main "dedicated" use of their income is in support of the dual-earner lifestyle *per se*. Brannen (1987) comments that "over four fifths paid for day care out of their own earnings ... Contingent upon employment as the mother's choice women expected and were expected, to bear the brunt of the costs of the dual earner lifestyle including a second car and paid domestic help" (p.61/2). Hence it is necessary to question the degree to which a return to employment actually does give women access to finances in any real sense of significant "additional" funds being available for her use, and therefore whether this can be, as suggested by some studies, regarded as an explanation of women's employment decisions following maternity leave.

In general the evidence would seem to support the proposition that the system of financial management adopted by the household is of some significance in influencing a woman's decision to return to employment following the birth of a child since "women's full-time employment (is) associated with the pooling (and more equal) systems whereas women's non-employment is associated with the segregated systems- allowance or whole wage" (Vogler 1989, p 23). However, in testing the strength and nature of this relationship it is worth noting Morris' (1984) point that equality in household arrangements depends crucially on women's full-time employment rather than on employment *per se* since low income part-time jobs, into which women are often pushed by inadequate household allowances, may simply supplement collective expenditure but fail to upset the traditional balance of financial power within the home. Worthy of note too is Pahl's (1984) point that allocative systems are shaped in various ways; by

both spouses employment statuses, mediated by class, socialisation and normative attitudes to gender roles - factors which also shape the 'meaning' which work holds for women, a factor at the core of another of the propositions relating to women's decisions to continue in employment.

4. Work Orientation

Women who see their employment as the source of their identity, for whom the work itself is intrinsically satisfying are more likely to continue in employment than those who have a purely instrumental view of work.

Goldthorpe et al (1968), amongst others, explored the different 'employment orientations' amongst workers. An 'employment orientation' they described as 'the meaning men give to work and the place and function they accord to work within their lives as a whole (p 9). A central feature of this approach is the distinction it draws between 'instrumental' and 'expressive' orientations and the links which are made between employment and other aspects of workers lives. For instrumental workers the primary meaning of work is in terms of a means to an end - the end being external to the work situation in extrinsic rewards outside the workplace, especially in the privatised world of family life. Expressive workers rewards, by contrast, are seen to be related to satisfaction with the job and/or aspects of the workplace environment.

This distinction was developed further by Bennett (1974, 1978) who suggested that most people will have some instrumental orientation to work, hence we must look beyond the purely instrumental to see which types of rewards are given priority. He suggested further categories of orientation, such as the "personal instrumental", to describe workers who attach priority to achieving the rewards of personal ambitions or personal developmental rewards, and the "social instrumental" those who whilst they work "for the money" also attach priority to achieving human and social relationships through work and find it emotionally satisfying.

The first point to be made is that the few studies which have compared men's and women's employment orientations have found that the various types of orientations are present for both men and women (Brown, Curran and Cousins 1983; Dex 1988). There has been debate over the extent to which orientations are formulated as a result of work or non-work experiences, or are an accommodation to what is perceived to be realistically possible. Some have suggested that workers have complex multi-stranded orientations. Brown (1973) and Daniel (1969, 1973), for example have suggested that workers have a variety of expectations and that these lead to a complex set of orientations which are unlikely to be captured under a single convenient label. Here however, the proposition suggests that women who have a more expressive orientation to work are more likely to continue in paid employment following the birth of a child than those of an instrumental orientation.

Clearly this is a highly complex issue and, as Dex (1984) has indicated, the two orientations are not mutually exclusive for women any more than they are for men. However, it is worthy of investigation since 'women are likely to make employment decisions in accordance with the meaning and value they attribute to their employment and earnings rather than their absolute monetary value' (Brannen and Moss 1991 p13).

Evidence is somewhat lacking in this entire area since most surveys have failed to pursue attitudes and feelings about work beyond one or two basic, and often rather crude, questions on reasons for working. Even if most mothers give 'financial reasons' as their main motive for working, the surveys which have explored this issue have found many who also cited the intrinsic rewards which they derived from work such as the stimulation of work and feeling useful (Martin and Roberts 1984, Kremer 1993). Dex (1988), in perhaps the most comprehensive study ever undertaken of women's "attitudes" to work, found that the majority of working women had either a "personal-instrumental" or a "social-instrumental" (Bennet 1974) orientation to work, i.e. that whilst they worked "for the money" they gave priority to work as a means of achieving personal development goals or as a way of achieving the reward of emotionally satisfying social relationships. Agassi (1982) in a detailed comparison of women's and men's attitudes and orientations to work in Israel, Germany and USA found that women had similar attitudes to men in their concern for personal freedom at work, their composite satisfaction level, their self confidence to perform a more challenging or responsible job and in their emphasis on the content of their job.

Whilst women initially appeared to have a more purely instrumental attitude towards work, when the characteristics of their jobs were controlled for (lower pay, fewer benefits, less job security) the differences disappeared. However the problem remains of whether those with an expressive orientation to work are any more likely to make the decision to return than those with an instrumental orientation.

There is some evidence available from Fogarty, Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) in the PEP study of 'Sex Career and Family' that married women with children have less expressive orientations on the whole, and lower career aspirations, than their single and childless counterparts. However, in a more recent study Brannen and Moss (1991) could find no difference between returners and non-returners in the three features of work which they cited as having been most important to them before taking maternity leave. What they did find was that 'occupational status' made a significant difference in orientation to work, ninety per cent of those who before maternity leave worked in low status occupations selected at least one instrumental feature such as good pay, security job prospects compared with only forty-eight per cent of women in high status jobs, who were more likely to mention expressive or intrinsic features such as interesting work, responsibility and opportunity to use one's abilities. Fifty-four per cent of high status workers mentioned job satisfaction as being important compared with twenty-seven per cent in low status jobs (p 48). The same study found that women returners were more likely to have worked in higher status occupations prior to the birth (p 43). Hence we are faced with the conundrum of whether it was the intrinsic rewards

associated with their employment and their expressive orientation to work which motivated more women in high status occupations to return, or the financial rewards, since those in high status occupations also have considerably higher earnings potential. Perhaps both serve as motivators since expressive and instrumental orientations are not mutually exclusive and, as Kremer and Montgomery (1993) point out, 'needs and motivations were traditionally thought of as being organised into a rigid hierarchy but more recently attention has turned to the processes by which we are able to accommodate and balance various needs simultaneously' (p 11).

The difficulty in proving or disproving the hypothesis that women with an expressive orientation to work are more likely to continue in employment than those with an instrumental orientation lies in the fact that, as Kremer suggests, "important as our attitudes and motivations may be, it should not be assumed that our thoughts and feelings will always have a direct bearing on behaviour" (p 191). In terms of work motivation, orientation and job satisfaction, close scrutiny reveals that the concepts themselves and the relationships between these concepts are not straightforward. Caution is necessary indeed in our approach to this entire area of study. The evidence from Agassi (1982) and others suggests that women's past experiences of work may be just as important as their attitudes or orientations in determining whether or not they will continue in employment following the birth of a child. If a woman's work has been routine, low-skilled, or had poor conditions it may not be intrinsically attractive and its lack of attraction may well produce an instrumental orientation as well as influence the

decisions to be made. A further difficulty lies in the fact that the meaning which employment holds for a woman cannot be viewed as something separate and distinct from the meaning which she gives to motherhood. Each is likely to be influenced by the other. Thomson (1995) sought to establish from responses to the British Social Attitudes Survey, whether working and non-working mothers in fact had differing attitudes towards motherhood and employment. Full-time working mothers were found to have less traditional views of motherhood, ie they tended to support options in favour of women working, than those who worked part-time, who in turn had less traditional views than those whose main activity was "looking after the home" (p.80). This does not prove, however, that working mothers stay at home because of the views that they hold. It could equally be the case that they hold the views that they do as a consequence of their differing work experience.

Overall the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is complex. There is evidence both that attitudes cause behaviour and behaviour causes attitudes. It therefore seems sensible to adopt Kleinke's (1984) compromise and to view the attitude-behaviour relationship as an interactive system in which attitudes and behaviour can exert a reciprocal influence on one another.

A further note of caution with regard to studies in this area is necessary in that accounts of attitudes to work may be, in some instances at least, subject to a degree of post hoc rationalisation (C. Wright Mills 1970), since by the time the questions were being posed the respondents would have made their decisions

regarding employment and explanations may have been advanced to explain their actions in terms which were acceptable to their own perceptions and intelligible to others. There is therefore a high probability that those intending to return to work were likely to view it as a relatively important area of their lives and to reconstruct their past employment orientations in a similar vein. Hence it is difficult to conclude with any certainty from studies of women's attitudes to employment that such attitudes are, in themselves, a significant factor governing women's employment decisions following maternity leave. The complexity of the relationship between attitudes and behaviours is deepened by the mediation of constraints upon mothers continuing in employment which may be either or both structural or attitudinal in nature. One such constraint may be the attitude which the woman's partner adopts to her employment and his willingness and/or ability to assist with domestic labour and childcare responsibilities, which is explored as the next proposition, but here again an awareness of the complexity of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is important.

5. Partner's attitude and support

A woman is more likely to return to work if her partner views her job as important to her well-being and that of the relationship, sees her earnings as important or necessary to the household's living standards, and encourages and supports her in her decision.

Most of the available evidence suggests that a partner's attitude may be significant

in influencing a woman's decision to continue in or leave paid employment.

Blood and Wolfe (1960), describing their 'resource theory of power' noted power in operation in the home in three particular household areas, including whether the wife should be employed. They suggest that any desire by a wife to increase her own power (which is closely related to occupational prestige and level of earnings) by generating independent income would first have to be negotiated with her husband. Yeandle's (1984) study supports this, reporting that many of the employed women interviewed accepted their husband's right to exercise their authority on this matter; 'the overwhelming impression of the marital bargaining over the question of wives' employment was that husbands held the balance of power In general wives sought husbands' permission or at least approval in taking a job' (p 148).

Brannen and Moss (1991) comment too that, given widespread normative disapproval in the wider society towards women's full-time employment when children are very young, husbands' attitudes were likely to be of some considerable significance (p 197). They found from their study of 'Managing Mothers' that the proportion of husbands thought to favour their wives working (41%) was almost equal to those thought to be opposed. However, within these overall figures there were clear occupational differences and this leads us to consider some of the factors which might influence a husband or partner's attitude to his wife's employment. Whilst some, as Yeandle (1984) reports, were content to see their wives at work because they knew it made them happier or because

they recognised that a more contented wife would be a more pleasant companion (p 148), for the majority of men their behaviour and attitudes were more likely to be influenced by the job status and earning capacity of their wives (Moss and Fonda 1980). Yeandle (1984) comments that 'many husbands were apparently happy about their wives employment because they appreciated the importance of their earnings in either enabling the family to make ends meet or having a higher standard of living' (p 145).

Brannen and Moss (1991) found that husbands of women in higher status jobs (and hence with good earnings potential) were more likely to be in favour (57%) of their wives continuing to work after the birth of a child than husbands of women in lower status occupations (27%) (p 197).

From the available evidence it seems clear that a partner's attitude is significant in determining whether or not mothers go out to work and partners are more likely to 'approve' where the woman has a high earning potential. However that is not to say that in the majority of cases partners are necessarily involved, helping the woman to make her decision. Brannen and Moss (1991) report that, even in those cases where husbands clearly approved of their wives returning to work for financial reasons, women never talked in terms of it being a joint decision. Most husbands were said to have 'sat on the fence' (p 47); few had views which were entirely clear cut and they suggest that by not expressing a clear unequivocal view men could escape involvement in the decision and its consequences. Brannen (1987) reported that of 62 respondents 23 said their

partner had been ambiguous or non-directive and had left them to decide; 11 had been directive, urging them to return to work but largely for financial reasons; 21 had expressed a preference for them to stay at home and only 7 were positive and facilitative in the decision to return to work.

A number of studies suggest that partners' 'approval' to women returning to work tends to be hedged with qualifications, some wanting their wives to work but for shorter hours or in non-demanding jobs. Yeandle (1984) reports, as a quite common response among men, a willingness to tolerate their wives employment on condition that the women did not allow standards of domestic labour and childcare to 'slip'. And thereby hangs a tale. Although clearly partners 'attitudes' are important, as stated above thoughts and feelings will not always have a direct bearing on behaviour and the relationship between attitudes and behaviours may at best be seen as an interactive system with each exerting a reciprocal influence on the other. Hence we might hypothesise that a partner's willingness and ability to share domestic work and childcare will be an even more significant factor than attitude alone in influencing a woman's decision to return to work following the birth of a child, although the two are likely to be positively related. Brannen (1987) found that where partners participated in the decision to return this was likely to lead to further participation and support once women were back at work.

There are however some contrary findings which suggest that most women feel it is their own decision 'up to the women herself', whether to work or remain at

home (Witherspoon 1987, Trewsdale and Toman 1993).

6. Sharing Household and Caring Responsibilities

A woman is more likely to return to work the more equally she and her partner share responsibility for childcare and for household tasks.

This is clearly an area of some significance; Arber and Gilbert (1992), amongst others, comment that "the nature and extent of women's participation in waged work is intimately connected with their unpaid domestic labour as mothers and housewives" (p.1). However the evidence in support of this proposition is inconclusive in that whilst most studies report increased participation from partners in domestic work and in particular in childcare, when a woman continues in employment after the birth of a child, the evidence is overwhelmingly that responsibility for childcare and for household tasks is not shared with anything approaching equality in other than a tiny minority of partnerships. Mansfield and Collard (1988) suggest that the basis for this is that 'by the end of the first quarter of the first year of marriage most newly weds had established some routine for running their households, one which normally meant that the major portion of domestic chores was performed by the wives in only one third of marriages did both husband and wife make more or less equal contributions to keeping house' (p 120 and 129). However, it might reasonably be assumed that the arrival of children and a decision that the wife should continue in employment, for whatever reason, would alter this position however

early in the marriage it has been established. For the evidence is that having young children does add substantially to the burden of domestic labour. Piachaud (1985), reporting on a survey of mothers' activities, concluded that the extra work involved in looking after a pre-school child amounted to "round about 50 hours a week" even before allowing for the time when the mother was "on call" but not doing a specific task. And indeed, as noted above, many studies do indicate increased participation from men in such circumstances. Horrell's recent study (1994) and a review of time-budget studies from several countries (Gershuny et al, 1994) suggest that there is a significant, if relatively small and gradual, shift of men's efforts in two respects: men with employed partners on average reduce their time in paid work and increase their contribution to unpaid work; and men in this situation also appear to be diverting their unpaid labour from traditionally "male" areas of activity into traditionally "female" tasks. As Gershuny et al put it "if we look just at the core 'cooking and cleaning' component of housework we find evidence of this transfer of domestic work from women to men in every case that we have comparative evidence for the 1970s and 1980s" (p.183). Laite and Halfpenny (1987) similarly comment that 'where men and women share the same employment status men do more of the domestic tasks than in other households' (p 229). Yeandle (1984) in her study of sixty-two married women in employment found that one third acknowledged an important contribution by husbands to domestic work.

About half of Yeandle's respondents also reported that husbands took a part in caring for their children and claimed that frequently the husband's willingness to

do this was the key factor in enabling the respondent to take a paid job. Dex (1988) found that as far as childcare was concerned, between 70-74% of full-time workers relied on help from their partners. She concluded that "clearly it is a minority of women who work full-time who have sole responsibility for childcare in the family" (p.134). More recently McLaughlin (1993) commenting on Northern Ireland also found that sharing of childcare was most likely to be reported in dual-earner couples when the women worked full-time, this was true of about 60% of couples. Work in the United States, such as that of Pleck (1985) and Berk (1985), similarly found that husbands with employed wives and small children participate at higher levels than other husbands and that husbands do respond to their wives' employment, primarily in their time availability to their children, not housework (Pleck p 50). However, despite such increased participation from men evidence from a wide range of studies in Great Britain, (Gershuny et al 1994, Morris 1995, Laite and Halfpenny 1987, Yeandle 1984, Pahl 1984, Wilson 1987, Witherspoon 1989, Brannen and Moss 1991), Northern Ireland (Kremer and Montgomery 1993, Tierney 1989, McLaughlin 1993), United States (Pleck 1985, Berk 1983, Geerken and Gove 1983, Hochschild 1989) and Australia (Russell (1983) overwhelmingly points to the continued persistence of the traditional homemaker role for women. Regardless of whether or not they had a paid job women continued to have responsibility for domestic work and for childcare. Hochschild (1989), for example, found that despite the fact that in the United States over half of all women with a child under one year were in work, most of them full-time, domestic work was shared to any significant degree in only 18% of households. Gershuny et al (1986) found that on average women did

16 hours more unpaid work per week than men - although in 1961 the gap had been 26 hours. Brannen and Moss (1991) found that 'dual earner lifestyles with both parents in full-time employment rarely result in an equalitarian division of the domestic work load even where beliefs are equalitarian' (p 213); Kremer and Montgomery (1993) found that 'while it is the case that some husbands do participate in childcare and they seem to be more likely to participate in childcare than housework, in the majority of relationships responsibility for the work carried out continues to rest with wives' (p 36). Montgomery and Davies (1991) commenting upon the findings of the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey found that 87% of respondents saw general domestic duties as mainly undertaken by women and 84% saw childcare as mainly the responsibility of women (p.77).

So what of the proposition that women are more likely to return to employment if their partners share childcare and housework? It seems that at best it can only be considered valid in some modified form, perhaps suggesting that women are more likely to return where partners will participate to 'some extent' in childcare and household tasks and certainly Brannen (1987) would suggest that when women are making their decisions it is the promise of future responsibility for, and involvement in, the care of the child and domestic chores that is most likely to buoy them up.

It would seem that help with children in particular and with managing the dual-earner lifestyle must perhaps come from outside the home in the form of family friendly employment practices and childcare facilities in order to be significant in

a woman's decision to continue in employment. Although in the context of both partner support and of "family friendly" employment practices it is worth noting Dex's (1988) comment that "if all types of jobs could be structured so that the hours norm for the job was a lot less than it is at present, with more opportunities for job-sharing but without the contractual and benefit losses that part-time work often involves then a redistribution of work might begin to be possible within the household [and would] tackle the [presently] unequal division" (p 154).

7. Family Friendly Employment Practices

A woman is more likely to return to work if her employer offers "family friendly" facilities such as reduced or flexible working hours, job sharing, parental leave, etc.

A survey undertaken for Equal Opportunities Review (EOR) in June/July 1995 (EOR 63/64) suggests that family-friendly employment practices may be somewhat more widespread in Britain than previously assumed by authors such as Moss and Fonda (1980), Brannen and Moss (1991) and Truman (1992). A note of caution is necessary however before applauding this apparent improvement in the situation. The report of the survey itself notes that whilst the results are based on questionnaires returned by 243 organisations across the UK, employing from 13 to 132,000 people, most of the respondents were medium sized or large organisations - more than 50% of the sample employed between a thousand and ten thousand people. The majority of respondents were also subscribers to Equal

Opportunities Review so it was perhaps not surprising that most of them offered maternity provisions in excess of the statutory minimum and family friendly employment practices. A different picture may well emerge from a study of smaller organisations which had not so clearly demonstrated a commitment to equality of opportunity in employment. The main findings of the EOR Survey were as follows:

Reduced Hours

Women who went on maternity leave had the opportunity to return to work on reduced hours in 92% of organisations. In just over 80% of these organisations the arrangement could be permanent. In most organisations the move to permanent reduced hours is subject to factors such as 'business needs', availability etc. A number of employers gave women the opportunity of a phased return to full-time working by offering temporary reduced hours working.

In support of the hypothesis that "a woman is more likely to return to work if her employer offers family friendly facilities" EOR comments that "access to reduced or flexible working hours is a major factor in determining whether a woman will return to work following maternity leave". The McRae Study (1991) found that one in five women taking maternity leave wanted changes in working time such as part-time working and job-sharing to enable them to return to work.

"Childcare Packages"

Just over half (56%) of employers provided at least one element of a childcare package comprising career breaks, nursery facilities, out of school play schemes and childcare allowances. The most popular element was a career break which was offered by 71% of employers offering at least one element of the package. Nursery facilities were offered by 43%; play schemes (including holiday schemes) by 25% and childcare allowances by 23%.

Again the comment is offered in support of the hypothesis that the greater the number of benefits offered the more likely it is that a woman will return to work with the same employer following her maternity leave. Nine out of ten women employed by an organisation which offers between five and seven benefits (from a range including enhanced maternity arrangements, reduced hours, career breaks, nursery, childcare allowance, play scheme and adoption leave) return to work. This decreases gradually as the number of benefits reduces.

The Equal Opportunities Review survey makes an important contribution to our factual knowledge in this area. A degree of scepticism is perhaps necessary however in assuming widespread availability of family-friendly employment practices.

As Novarra (1980) and others have demonstrated the world of paid employment in advanced industrial societies remains oriented towards the male employee for

whom employment, rightly or wrongly, is taken to be a, if not the, central life interest. Although a few concessions have been made to women it is still substantially true that if women wish to participate in the labour market they must adapt to, and fit in with, the current requirements of most paid work, its routinisation and standard organisation of working time. Moss (1988) tells us that most employment continues to be organised in such a way as to ignore employees' responsibilities as parents, deeming them to be the private concerns of individuals. The PSI study (McRae, 1991) found virtually no overall change in access to flexible working arrangements since the 1979 survey "an almost static picture with part-time arrangements remaining the most commonly reported facility for flexibility" (p.52). It reports little change too in facilities available to enable fathers to participate in parenting, with the vast majority having no access to contractual paternity leave and relying on holiday entitlements even around the time of the birth. It is perhaps significant too that recommendations to help working parents, made by a recent report¹ from the all-party House of Commons Select Committee on Employment, have been soundly rejected by the Government in a formal reply. Recommendations which included, calls for an extension of Statutory Maternity Pay, a widening of tax-relief to cover all forms of employer-assisted childcare, five days statutory family leave, and statutory paternity leave, would, says the Government "place unreasonable burdens on employers and taxpayers". The Government also reiterated its view that "how parents combine their domestic responsibilities with their wish or need to work is essentially a

¹'Mothers in Employment: Vol.I, report and proceedings of the Committee', HMSO.
'Mothers in Employment - Government reply to the first report of the Committee in session 1994-95', HMSO.

matter for them to decide in the light of their own particular circumstances".

However, all is not bleak. In particular public sector employers offer many of the facilities surveyed by Equal Opportunities Review. Given that 62% of all public sector employees in Northern Ireland are women (Kremer and Montgomery 1993) one may be forgiven for speculating that this is one of the factors which serve to make public sector employment so attractive to women. A note of caution is sounded in this respect by the Davies and Rosser study (1986) of women in the NHS. They suggest that the women in their study were disadvantaged not by particular employment policies and procedures but by practices that developed in the absence of policy and in a hostile environment. Studies of women who left employment in the NHS (e.g. Campbell and Devore 1991, Dixon and Shaw 1986) suggest dissatisfaction with inflexible terms and conditions of employment and that "work patterns needed to be adjusted to meet the priorities of married women" Campbell and Devore (1991:6).

Hence we cannot assume that all is well for all women working in the public sector vis à vis those in the private sector where family friendly employment practices are largely non-existent.

Two other pieces of evidence are of some significance in relation to this proposition. In the Northern Ireland WWLS some 73% of employed mothers indicated that they could easily get time off work, for example, when their children were ill (McLaughlin 1993). This suggests either that flexibility on the

part of employers may already play an important part in the continuing employment of working mothers, or conversely, that mothers may be constrained to work only for those employers who will facilitate time-off for medical, educational and other child-related requirements (Turner 1993). If this is the case the existence of family-friendly employment practices, however informally arranged, may well be said to be a factor significant in influencing a woman's decision to continue in employment following the birth of a child.

Despite somewhat conflicting evidence on this proposition from studies of the UK, evidence which is of some significance comes from studies of employment practice in other European countries. Kamerman (1980) Moss (1988) and Cohen (1990) in particular, document initiatives taken in countries as diverse as Belgium and France, Portugal and Denmark, to enable both men and women to reconcile their occupational and family obligations. Moss (1988) points to the fact that Britain continues to have one of the lowest levels of full-time participation in the labour market by married women anywhere in the EC (second only to Ireland) and in marked contrast again to Belgium and France where almost all women remain in employment after the birth of their first child. This finding is echoed by Beechey (1989) and by Procter and Ratcliffe (1992) who, from a comparative study of women's employment in Britain and France comment that "British women still show a much higher rate of labour market withdrawal in the peak child-rearing phase of life and tend to return to part-time employment after this; French women show a much lower rate of withdrawal when children are young and remain in full-time employment to a far greater degree" (p.73). We may well

share Procter and Ratcliffe's view that these higher participation rates owe less to a culture of support for maternal employment than to the availability of carer-friendly employment practices and publicly funded childcare provision, but it is arguable that the one is dependent upon the other. A culture and society which assumes and supports the fact that mothers will continue in employment is much more likely to provide the wherewithal to enable that employment than a culture in which the working mother has been defined as "the source of social problems" (Beechey 1989). These attitudes and ideologies of the wider society may well in themselves act as a constraint upon an individual's decision to continue in employment following maternity leave and hence we cannot, as a number of studies have done, make the simplistic assumption that if carer friendly employment practices are available they will, in themselves alter women's employment decisions. Truman (1992) suggests that even when carer-friendly employment practices and initiatives such as flexible working, job-sharing, re-entry and retainer schemes do exist they do not necessarily improve the occupational attainment of women. Such initiatives by employers are based on "the assumption that women do, and should, bear the brunt of the responsibility for organising childcare and the home and so perpetuate the view that employed women should continue to do a double shift of paid employment and unpaid domestic labour rather than promoting a more egalitarian division of domestic labour" (p.23). As such they may reflect, in behavioural terms, the attitudes of the wider society towards "working mothers" whilst the policies and practices of employers in countries such as Belgium and France reflect the cultural context in which they operate. It may well be supposed then that one of the factors

motivating Belgian and French mothers to continue in employment is the availability of carer friendly employment practices which, as well as providing flexibility for women, enable men to participate in the care of their children. The other factor of significance is perhaps the much greater availability of publicly funded childcare in such countries.

8. Childcare Facilities

A woman is more likely to return to work if childcare facilities are readily available.

A study of European Women and Men in 1983 (CEC 1983) found that although women were less likely to be in paid work than men in the first place the overwhelming majority of both those who did work and those not in work preferred to be in employment. Those findings have been supported by numerous studies within the UK, all of which suggest that women, including many of those with young children would prefer to be employed. Whilst the precise reasons why many such women are not in paid work are often complex, it seems reasonable to hypothesise that one major structural constraint may be the lack of affordable and suitable childcare facilities, since no mother with a pre-school child can return to work without arranging some form of childcare. Much of the evidence relating to the lack of family friendly employment practices in the UK applies also to childcare facilities. Although between 1988 and 1994 there was a 153 per cent increase in the number of private nurseries in the UK and a 40 per

cent increase in registered childminders (House of Commons, 1995) within the EC the UK remains one of the three countries with the lowest levels of *publicly* funded childcare services (Moss 1988) providing care for 1% of children under three and the equivalent of full-time care for about one quarter of children aged three to school age. Within the UK, Northern Ireland has the poorest provision of all (Cohen 1990, Melhuish and Moss 1991).

As may be seen from Table 1.1 below, Northern Ireland in 1993-94 could offer only 20 day nursery places per 1000 population compared even to the UK average of 44, and a total of only 258 day care places per 1000 population 0-4 years, as against the UK average of 281. Turner (1993) reported that only 8% of parents were using nurseries, mostly privately run and expensive, for children under three. The majority of children, 67%, were looked after by a relative, with 30% being served by childminders, registered or unregistered.

Table 1.1

Childcare provision by type per 1000 population aged 0-4 years (1993-94)				
	<i>Playgroups</i>	<i>Day Nurseries</i>	<i>Childminders</i>	<i>Total Day Care</i>
N. Ireland	124	20	115	258
England	127	46	111	283
Scotland	134	49	98	281
Wales	137	29	87	254
UK Average	128	44	108	281

Source: Women and Men in Northern Ireland, EOC (NI), 1995.

In the Northern Ireland WWLS and a number of other community-based studies, the majority of mothers not in employment indicated that they would seek work if affordable childcare facilities were available (Turner 1993). In the McRae study (1991) some 50% of mothers identified improved childcare facilities as necessary to their return to work; 12% of those not in work were unable to find suitable childcare and 11% could not find childcare they could afford. Ward et al (1994) confirm that for women earning little, paid childcare is not an option and conclude that this has the effect of being a severe restraint on the scope of paid employment for such women. Such reports must of course be approached with a degree of caution since numerous other factors, including the availability of work which is sufficiently highly paid to overcome the disincentives of the Social Security system, the attitudes and wishes of partners etc are likely to impinge upon a woman's decision to return to employment. The latest survey of British Social Attitudes (1994), for example, suggests that most mothers would prefer their children to be looked after by a relative or their husbands (Thomson 1995). The supply of such childcare is not inexhaustible, and if women will not return to work unless they have their preferred form of childcare, then no amount of subsidised childcare provision will make a difference to them. The survey found, also, many women who said that their first or second choice would be to work during school hours, or to take their child to a workplace nursery. The return-to-work behaviour of these women may depend as much on the availability of jobs with suitable hours, and accommodating employers, as on subsidised childcare. As Brannen and Moss (1991) have found 'lack of childcare provision is rarely the sole reason (for leaving full-time employment); few women are

prepared to take on the 'double burden' at this stage and most felt at some level that motherhood ought to be a full-time activity' (p 69). Hence availability of childcare may be a necessary but not sufficient condition for women's return to employment. The findings of the EOR Survey on provision of childcare packages by employers would certainly suggest that they are of some significance in influencing a return to work. In addition, the differences in women's labour market participation levels between Britain and other European countries still demands explanation. Part at least of that explanation may lie in differing levels of childcare provision. Again, a number of comparative studies are of interest in this area and Table 1.2 suggests a series of interesting contrasts and extremes throughout Europe.

Table 1.2

Percentage of children in publicly-funded childcare services 1985-86		
	<i>0-2 years</i>	<i>3-5 years</i>
Germany	3	60
France	20-25	95
UK	2	44
Denmark	44	87
Italy	5	88
Ireland	1	52
Norway	7.7	46.4
Sweden	30.6	57.2

Sources: Phillips, A. and Moss, P. (1988) Who Cares for Europe's Children? Short Report of the European Childcare Network, EC. NORD 1987: 23 Table 212.18, p.318-19.

Table 1.2 above, shows how the UK compares to a number of European countries in terms of childcare provision. The Procter and Ratcliffe (1992) study of mothers in Coventry and in Rouen compares the position in Britain and France and suggests that, whilst there is some evidence that French culture is more supportive of women's employment than British, this provides only a limited part of the explanation for why a much higher proportion of women with children work continuously in full-time employment in France than in Britain. The big difference, they suggest, lies in the availability of childcare in the two countries. Respondents were asked if they ever had to leave a job because of pregnancy or the need to look after children: 69% of the Coventry women and 29% of the Rouen women said they had left a job in such circumstances. They were asked if difficulty in finding adequate childcare facilities had ever prevented them from taking a job, 22% of the British and 13% of the French women said yes. Walters and Dex (1992) point to various types of policies, ranging from provision of nursery education and tax provisions, to the more specific, for example maternity leave policies and policies on childcare provision which affect the differing levels of continuity of employment in the two countries. Moss (1988) illustrates this by pointing to the fact that French state financial support for childcare is extensive. For families where both parents are employed and children looked after outside the family home, the mother can claim a tax allowance of 10,000FF per year towards the cost of care for each child. If a caregiver works in the child's home a state grant of 2000FF per month is available or in the caregiver's own home a grant of 300FF per month per child. Moss points too to the provision of publicly funded childcare and the contrasts between the British and French positions. He

estimates that in the UK only 2% of children under 3 years are in publicly funded nurseries rising to 44% of 3-4 year olds in pre- and early primary schooling and points out that the latter figure must be qualified, as in pre-primary schooling the child attends for only a few hours each day, whilst early primary schooling is essentially a brief period of introduction to school for 4 year olds who are rising 5. In addition there is an unknown proportion of children looked after by childminders and nannies for whom no public support is given. The PSI study (McRae, 1991) found that three usual carers were cited most frequently by working mothers: fathers, grandmothers and childminders and overall, fathers were the most likely providers of childcare given the large numbers of women in the study working part-time. In France, by contrast, all children start pre-primary education at 3 years for 5-6 hours per day with care extended outside school hours in a substantial proportion of schools. For those under 3 years, the group of most interest for the current study, there is provision for 25% of children in publicly funded nurseries. In addition there is an array of non-publicly funded but supervised facilities and childminders. Walters and Dex (1992) claim that in Britain, in contrast to France, social policy pertaining to working parents is largely negative with the issue of daycare for children of working parents largely ignored, other than in the compilation of lists of registered childminders.

A further contrast is provided by the situation in Sweden. Sweden has had more than twenty years of statutory parental leave (shared between parents) which can be taken as full-time, half-time or quarter-time at any time during the child's first four years, (Leira, 1993) and by 1989 over 80% of 3-6 year olds and about one

third of 0-2 year olds were in publicly funded daycare. In Sweden the increase in women's labour force participation rates, and including those of women with young children, has indeed been dramatic, rising from 37.9% of women with children 0-6 in 1963 to 85.8% of such women in 1988 (Jonung and Persson, 1993), although it should be noted that Swedish mothers are counted as in the labour force when on various types of maternity leave. This in fact means that less than half of all mothers of very young children actually go to work.

The difference in women's labour market participation levels between Britain and other European countries, and between Britain and the United States where most mothers continue in full-time employment following maternity leave, demand explanation. Given the evidence above it does seem likely that there is indeed a relationship between the availability (and the financing) of childcare and the likelihood of women returning to employment following maternity leave. However, as stated above, readily available and affordable childcare may well be a necessary but not sufficient condition for an individual's return to employment following maternity leave. The interaction of such structural factors with attitudes and ideologies is vastly more complex than might be assumed from studies to date.

Summary

The factors suggested by previous studies as significant for women's employment decisions following maternity leave are:

- partner's employment and earnings;
- the individual's employment status, education and earnings;
- household financial arrangements;
- the "meaning" of work to the individual, ie. work orientation;
- partner's attitude and support;
- the degree of sharing of household and caring responsibilities;
- availability of "family-friendly" employment practices;
- availability of child-care facilities.

There are varying degrees of evidence from the literature in support of the propositions suggested in this chapter. An objective of the present study is to test the strength of the relationship between each of the suggested variables and the likelihood of an individual returning to work following maternity leave. By so doing it is hoped to add to our understanding of the complexity of women's employment decisions, and of the relative importance of various factors such as personal and partners attitudes and preferences, vis à vis policy relevant issues, such as the opportunities and constraints provided by the wider society.

CHAPTER 2

THE STUDY IN CONTEXT

It is suggested above that women's employment decisions may be viewed as the outcome of the interaction between an individual's attitudes, the attitudes of her partner and the wider society, the choice-set which is available to each individual and the opportunity structures and constraints with which she is faced. Each of these factors will be influenced, albeit to varying degrees, by the contexts, economic, social, political and legislative in which the decision-maker is acting and in which the decisions are to be made. Attitudes to working mothers, for example, held by individuals, families, employers, work colleagues or the State will be influenced by historical factors and by the economic, social, political and legislative environment in which mothers may be seeking employment. The choice set available to individuals will also vary as will the structural opportunities and constraints, depending upon the historical context, and economic, social and political factors. International comparisons bear witness to such variations, as do comparisons between regions within a country, between social classes or between different sectors of the economy.

The complexity of the process by which women make decisions regarding employment following childbirth is acknowledged. For a study which seeks to explore the interaction of a diverse range of variables it is both necessary and appropriate that it should be seen in context in terms of the historical, economic, social and political environment. This may be achieved by examining the location of the study, both in terms of geography i.e. the Northern Ireland context, and in terms of the sector of the economy in which it was

conducted, i.e. amongst public sector employees working in the health service.

NORTHERN IRELAND

This study was undertaken in Northern Ireland where 61.3% of women are economically active (Northern Ireland Census, 1991), compared to 71.6% for the United Kingdom as a whole. Even in this part of the UK, however, women account for 42.7% of the workforce and there was a dramatic increase in the number of female employees in Northern Ireland during the 1980s, some 28,200 (Department of Economic Development, 1981 and 1989), largely due to an increase in part-time jobs which accounted for 74% of the increase (Northern Ireland Economic Council, 1992). Overall 34% of women working in Northern Ireland do so on a part-time basis. Like their counterparts in Great Britain women in Northern Ireland are heavily dependant on the service sector (private and public) for employment. Eighty per cent of women working in Northern Ireland are concentrated in the four occupational groups of, education, health and welfare; clerical and related; selling; catering, cleaning and hairdressing, and nearly 60% of all women in employment work in the public sector. Whilst no study of the impact of motherhood on employment patterns, equivalent to the Policy Studies Institute survey (McRae, 1991) has been undertaken in Northern Ireland, we do know that 55.3% of women with a child under four years are economically active in the province. We know too that, although women in Northern Ireland are generally less likely to be economically active than those in the UK as a whole, regardless of the presence of dependent children, the fall in economic activity levels due to the presence of children is less steep here (Table 2.1 below):

Table 2.1

Economic Activity Rates for Women Aged 20-59(%) by Number of Dependent Children				
	<i>No children</i>	<i>One child</i>	<i>Two Children</i>	<i>Three or More</i>
UK	77.1	67.3	63.4	46.7
Northern Ireland	65	60	59	52

Sources: Eurostat, Community Labour Force Survey; Women's Working Lives Survey (NI) 1993

A further, interesting and largely unexplained phenomenon is that although in the United Kingdom economic activity rates are significantly influenced by the age of youngest child, rising from 46.5% of women whose youngest child is under two years to 76% when children are aged seven to fourteen years, in Northern Ireland activity levels barely change with the age of youngest dependent child, rising by just over one percentage point from 55.3% at four years or less to 56.4% at between eleven and sixteen (NI Labour Force Survey).

Northern Ireland is the setting for the present study and Northern Ireland, despite recent ceasefires and a so-called "peace process" remains a divided society in terms of religion, politics and national identity. It is perhaps acceptable then, in the context of the study, to ask whether women's labour force participation and the likelihood of mothers returning to work varies in any respect in relation to religious affiliation or community background. This is especially so since it is a study of women employed in health care and a recent survey has shown that "public sector work, especially in medicine and health is the most

important sector of work for Catholic women in Northern Ireland" (Davis et al, 1995 p.iv). The survey showed that 20.5% of Catholic women work in medical and health related occupations compared to 17.2% of Protestant women. It is difficult to say with any great degree of confidence that this higher proportion of Catholic to Protestant women is significant for rates of return following childbirth. It is known however that whilst Protestant households tend to have more dual-earning partnerships than their Catholic counterparts (Smith and Chambers, 1991), and while the partners of Protestant women are more likely to be in paid work (87.1%) than those of Catholic women (68%), higher proportions of Catholic mothers with very young children are likely to be in full-time employment (27.6%) than are Protestant mothers in the same category (21.5%) (David et al, 1995). This may well be a factor of some significance for rates of return to employment in the health-service in Northern Ireland, it was not, however, one of the variables chosen for the present study.

Northern Ireland is unusual in that it is geographically a part of the island of Ireland and hence shares many of the island's physical, cultural and societal attributes. Politically and legislatively, however, Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom and, especially since the advent of direct rule from London in 1972, has drawn ever closer to the British economy. As with most regions, however, Northern Ireland is both similar to, and at the same time different from, the rest of the UK. Whilst in very general terms it might be said to be subjected to much the same economic forces as Great Britain, it has experienced less violent swings in the economic cycle over recent years than other parts of the UK - due in part at least to the predominance of the public sector which employs some 42% of the province's workforce. In terms of unemployment, however, Northern

Ireland has, in the postwar era, consistently experienced considerably higher levels than elsewhere in the UK, currently 13.1 % as against the national average of less than 10%. The economy has largely failed to generate employment opportunities on a par with the growth of the labour force and this in itself may be a significant factor explaining the lower levels of economic activity amongst women in the province. McWilliams (1991) comments that "perceptions amongst [the population] that there are no jobs available are likely to affect the number of married women seeking employment and registering as unemployed. It may be this assessment that leads them ultimately to be classed as "economically inactive" (p.27). More specifically, Northern Ireland has also throughout the post war period endured a much higher rate of long-term unemployment than the UK as a whole. Currently 60% of unemployed men and 40% of unemployed women in Northern Ireland fall into this category, compared to levels of 40% and 28% respectively in Britain. Long term unemployment, and the consequent reliance on means tested Income Support, is undoubtedly a factor of some significance for the labour market participation of married women in Northern Ireland.

Associated with the high levels of unemployment in the province are extremes of poverty and deprivation. Northern Ireland has the lowest per capita income in the UK, at 76% of the national average, and Family Expenditure Survey data shows that the average weekly income of households is 31% lower than the national average. However it does have to be said that there are perhaps greater social divisions in Northern Ireland, with more polarisation between dual-earner couples and non-earner couples than elsewhere. This is again in part due to the disincentives embedded in welfare benefits legislation. These economic facts of life are coupled with the highest birthrate in the UK, and indeed

in Europe, at 16.5 births per 1000 population (Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1993); the poorest childcare provision with only 20 day nursery places per 1000 children under three years of age (EOC(NI), 1995); the lowest divorce rate, with the family still a very powerful social institution (McShane and Pinkerton, 1986); the highest church attendance in the UK, some 57% of the population claiming frequent attendance compared to only 15% in Britain (Sneddon and Kremer, 1991); some of the most traditional and conservative social attitudes in relation to sexual behaviour and family life, for example 43% of respondents in the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey (1991) felt that premarital sex was "always" or "mostly" wrong; and strong religious conservatism might also be inferred from the widespread opposition to recent legislative changes on divorce and homosexuality. The other dominant feature of Northern Ireland society has been, until recently, unparalleled levels of civil unrest and community violence, which in itself may have given religious identity a social and political significance that it no longer enjoys in Britain, and which, in the view of Chavetz (1990), will heighten traditionalism regarding women's roles in any society.

Northern Ireland is also perhaps different from the rest of the UK in the extent to which the "mixed economy of welfare", i.e. the extent to which social provision is made by the state, the market, the family or the voluntary sector, has developed. In Britain over the past 10-15 years the stated aim of government has been a reduction or withdrawal from levels of state provision. In Northern Ireland this has been less evident with high levels of investment continuing, particularly in public authority housing, healthcare and in public sector jobs - although it has not extended to improvements in childcare provision which has remained largely the province of the family and the voluntary, often religious,

sector. This greater state involvement may well stem from a recognition of the higher levels of poverty and unemployment in the province or perhaps, more cynically, from a belief that "throwing money at the problem" may help to appease a somewhat alienated population and contain levels of civil strife.

So what of attitudes to women's roles in Northern Ireland and the influences which such attitudes have upon both the behaviour of individuals and the wider society? Commentators have frequently drawn attention to the traditionalism and conservatism of Northern Ireland, particularly with regard to family issues, sexuality and women's role in society (e.g. Ward and McGivern, 1980; Edgerton, 1986; Roulston, 1989). They have argued that this conservatism is rooted in, and reinforced by, the influence of the churches, which advocate a traditional role for women as wives and mothers within the family. Whilst not so extreme as in the Republic of Ireland, where the traditional division of labour between men and women is actually enshrined in the 1937 Constitution and underpinned by the minimal scope provided in law for sexual autonomy whether in respect of access to divorce, contraception or abortion, nonetheless Northern Ireland is a conservative society.

We are told that even in Britain women who resume employment contravene the normative assumption that "good" mothering involves staying at home when the children are young (Brannen, 1987). And we know that since the war one of the main debates surrounding "normal" motherhood has been the question of the effects of "maternal separation" (Bowlby, 1951) upon not only the child's physical health and welfare but also their emotional and intellectual development. What then are attitudes to working mothers

in the apparently more traditional Northern Ireland society? The Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey found strong support in the province for a woman's "right to work", with some 71 % of respondents supporting that right (Stringer and Robinson, 1993). It found support too for Sex Discrimination legislation relating to employment and pay, which 88 % of respondents thought necessary, far stronger than the support for example, for Fair Employment legislation. Once the demands of family were referred to, however, the consensus began to break down. Less than half the sample, just 47%, felt that women should try to combine a career and raising children and only slightly more women than men viewed the combination of career and family as acceptable. Forty-one per cent of the sample agreed with the statement that "a preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works". Paid work, even part-time paid work is not regarded as acceptable when a woman has a child under school age. Half the respondents to the Social Attitudes Survey, 51 % of men and 49 % of women felt that a woman's duty is to stay at home and devote the major part of her attention to her children. Just over one third (36 %) felt that working part-time is acceptable when children are under 5 years of age (Stringer and Robinson, 1993).

Most people in Northern Ireland then seem to agree in principle to a woman's right to work. But the idea that it is a woman's responsibility to care for the children, and that a decision by her to work prevents this and has negative consequences, is deeply ingrained. A majority both of men and women believe that a woman's right to work is conditional on her first discharging her responsibilities to her children.

The findings above would seem to indicate that Northern Ireland remains, in many

respects, a conservative traditional society - although some would suggest not so different from many other parts of the world. Harding (1989) for example suggests that there is a wider international pattern in which "when respondents are asked to take family commitments into account their enthusiasm for women working outside the home rapidly diminishes" (p.145).

The question to be asked, however, relates to the nature and strength of the relationship between such traditional attitudes to women's roles and the behaviour of individuals and the wider society. It is recognised that the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is complex, with evidence that attitudes cause behaviour but that behaviour also gives rise to attitudes (Kleinke, 1984). Important as our attitudes and motivations may be, it should not be assumed that our thoughts and feelings will always have a direct bearing on behaviour (Kremer, 1993). Hence it is observed that, despite widespread disapproval of women working whilst they have young children, 55% of women with a child under 4 years old in Northern Ireland are economically active, i.e. either in employment or seeking employment. It is well to note as above, however, that a society which assumes and supports the fact that mothers will continue in employment is more likely to provide the wherewithal to enable that employment than a society in which the working mother is defined as "the source of social problems" (Beechey, 1989). These attitudes and ideologies of the wider society may well act as a constraint upon an individual's decision to continue in employment following the birth of a child, not merely through normative disapproval, but by producing structural impediments to that employment. It is perhaps no coincidence then that Northern Ireland, with its traditional views of women as wives and mothers within the home, has the poorest childcare provision in Europe and little,

aside from the public sector, in terms of carer-friendly employment practices which, as well as providing flexibility for women, would enable men to participate in the care of their children.

All of the factors above in their different ways impact upon women's experiences of, and opportunities for, work, and they may well make the employment decisions of Northern Ireland mothers either similar to or different from, those of women elsewhere.

It is for such reasons that Northern Ireland with its "manageable" population of around 1,500,000 presents an interesting location for the study of women's working lives; a location where "factors which universally play their part in determining women's employment may be revealed most starkly and vividly" (Kremer and Montgomery, 1993, p.6).

HEALTH SERVICE EMPLOYEES

The sample chosen for this study of "Employment Decisions following Maternity Leave" is composed of women who had taken maternity leave from employment in the National Health Service in Northern Ireland.

The National Health Service (NHS) in Britain employs more than one million people, 79% of whom are female. (In Northern Ireland 76% of the 52,000 Health and Social Services employees are women). In nursing and midwifery for example, the biggest staff group which accounts for half of all NHS employees, 90% are women. In the

administrative and clerical staff grades some 84% of employees are women; 74% of ancillary staff are women, and in the professions allied to medicine, such as pharmacy, physiotherapy and radiography, 88% of those employed are female. The NHS is thus the largest employer of women in Europe and "unique among employers in the scale of its reliance on well-educated and trained women to staff the professions and maintain the service" (EOC 1992).

The Department of Health's Annual Census of NHS Manpower, which is the source for most of the available data, tells us that 37% of women employed in the NHS work part-time, with particular concentrations of part-time employees in nursing (41%) and administrative and clerical work (42%).

Information on the overall position of women in the NHS workforce, the grades and levels at which they are employed and their employment and career patterns within the Health Service is not comprehensive however and, until the relatively recent advent of the Opportunity 2000 initiative spearheaded by the NHS Management Executive, data tended to be available only from studies of particular staff groupings noted below. From these, and from the Equal Opportunities Survey of Women's Employment in the NHS (1990), we do have some information on the position of women in the NHS workforce. We know that, despite their numerical predominance in the nursing profession, women are under-represented in the senior nursing grades; only 63% of nursing officer (manager) posts are held by women (NUPE, 1990) and the average time taken for women to reach this level is 17.9 years compared to 8.4 years for men (Davies and Rosser, 1986). We know that despite the fact that 84% of administrative and clerical workers

are women, men hold 82% of the General Manager posts in the NHS (EOC, 1990). Over 60% of managers are women, but they are largely concentrated in the lower levels of management (NHS Management Executive, 1992) i.e. not on Senior Manager grades. The Davies and Rosser study found a "bottom-heavy" administrative structure with women forming the large base of junior administrative, clerical and secretarial grades. We know that 50% of entrants to medical school are women but just over 15% of consultants are female and less than 1% of consultant general surgeons are female (EOC 1990 and NHSME 1992).

Both the McRae study (1991) and the more recent Survey of Maternity Provisions undertaken for the Equal Opportunities Review (1995) suggest that the return to work rate of women employed by organisations offering enhanced maternity provisions i.e. maternity leave and maternity pay is higher than that of women employed by organisations which offer only the basic statutory provision described in the introduction to this study. The EOR survey suggests that the rate of return is as much as 15% higher amongst women benefitting from enhanced provisions. It is therefore worth noting at this point the maternity provisions generally available to health service employees since these are considerably greater than the statutory provision and so might be assumed to provide an incentive for mothers to return to work in the service. The enhanced provisions are said to be "generally" available since there is some suggestion within the report of the EOR Survey (1995) of local variations, for example in terms of entitlement based on length of service and in entitlements for full-time and part-time workers. It seems likely that, as self-governing Trusts gain greater autonomy and wage bargaining becomes more decentralised moving away from Whitley Council structures, such variations in provision

may increase.

For the present however, women who have worked in the health service for at least one year and have worked up to at least eleven weeks before the baby is due, are entitled to eighteen weeks paid Maternity Leave. This is made up of eight weeks at full pay and ten weeks at half pay plus Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity Benefit if applicable. Those who subsequently decide not to return to work for a minimum three month period may be liable to refund the whole of the Occupational Maternity Pay received less what they would have been entitled to under the Statutory Maternity Pay Scheme. Statutory Maternity Pay, for those eligible, that is those earning above the National Insurance threshold and in employment for twenty-six weeks, is currently paid for eighteen weeks with the first six weeks at 90% of average earnings and the remaining twelve weeks at a flat rate of £52.50 per week. Hence women, such as those employed in the health service, entitled to Contractual or Occupational Maternity Pay are substantially better off than those receiving only the statutory provision.

The past decade has been one of considerable reorganisation in the NHS and it is therefore worth considering what impact, if any, the structural and management changes of recent years have had and are likely to have upon the position of women in the NHS workforce, since this may also be a factor of some significance for the likelihood of mothers continuing in employment.

There is a view that the implementation, since the mid '80s, of the recommendations of The Griffiths Report (1983) on the management of the NHS has been detrimental to the

position of women in the Health Service. Griffiths recommended that General Managers be appointed at Regional District and Unit level in the NHS with overall responsibility for management performance in achieving organisational objectives. This replaced the former "consensus management" system in which management teams consisting of an administrator, treasurer, doctor and nurse had joint responsibility for health care management. The new system may have reduced career opportunities for women in the NHS, the majority of whom are nurses, because of the new emphasis on the management function, seen as something of a male preserve, rather than upon occupational specialisation. The evidence to date would suggest that nurses, but not necessarily women who are nurses, have secured about 10% of General Management posts (IHSM Report for NHS Women's Unit, 1995).

There have been suggestions too that the 1990s Health Service changes, including the creation of the so-called "internal market", have served only to fragment interest in, and responsibility for, issues relating to the position of women in the NHS workforce. In this latest reorganisation District Health Authorities have been split into commissioning units (Purchasers of Service) and Service Providers, who may be either directly managed units, trusts or the private health care sector. The implications for women of these most recent changes remain to be seen.

But the structural and management changes of the past decade, far-reaching and significant though they may be, have perhaps touched fewer women employed by the NHS than the "ideological" changes which have led to Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) and the "privatisation" of many, mostly ancillary services, such as

cleaning, catering and laundry. Seventy-four per cent of employees in the NHS ancillary services are women; most of those employed in cleaning and catering jobs, whether public or private sector, are women. Hence the impact of changes to such jobs has been felt most severely by women. Evidence available thus far suggests that despite the supposed safeguards under Tupe (Transfer of Undertakings - Protection of Employment Regulations) privatisation of ancillary services has led to lower pay rates and fewer working hours in which to do the job. The Key Note Consultancy Study (1986) found that, for example, 75 % of cleaners were women working less than 16 hours per week and hence with no entitlement to sick pay, paid holidays or maternity benefit.

The almost revolutionary changes which have taken place in the NHS over the past decade may then have had a disproportionately greater impact upon the Service's female employees than upon their male counterparts.

Concerns have been frequently voiced regarding labour turnover in the NHS - especially turnover amongst nurses where the oft-quoted statistic is of 30,000 nurses leaving the NHS each year (NUPE, 1990) at a training cost of £40,000 per nurse (DHSS NI, 1993). This has been traditionally high (Day and Klein, 1986) but is becoming more significant as demographic changes lead to a fall in the number of 18 year old entrants to the profession and changes in the system of nurse training (Project 2000) mean fewer students in the workforce (NUPE, 1990). Despite this, few studies have looked at factors influencing women's employment decisions in the NHS. Of particular concern here are decisions which mean that women who are mothers either stay or leave employment after maternity leave. Those that have done so have been projects focusing on particular staff

groups. Davies and Rosser (1986) studied administrative and clerical and nursing staff in two District Health Authorities. Crompton and Sanderson (1986) looked at pharmacists; Homans (1989) at women in clinical chemistry laboratories and Elston (1980) at female doctors. Such studies concluded variously that; in nursing there was rarely a consideration of repackaging working hours to fill vacancies (Davies and Rosser); that the opportunity structure in administrative and clerical work set out a career path that men found easier to tread than women (Davies and Rosser); that women were regarded as providing a lower yielding return on investment than men because it was claimed, women did not stay in the NHS for enough full-time working years (Homans); that women make up 61% of hospital pharmacists because, unlike retail pharmacy, it offers the opportunity for part-time work (Crompton and Sanderson); and that "wastage" among the medical profession is only regarded as problematic when associated with childbearing and childraising, not when associated with moves into private practice, ill health or deregistration. These studies, whose purpose was largely to inform the debate on equality of opportunity in the NHS, have tended to focus upon the "external", policy relevant and structural constraints upon women's decisions to the exclusion of the role played by individual attitudes and choices. A further difficulty in relation to those studies which have been undertaken on labour turnover, and in particular on female labour turnover, in the NHS lies in the fact that some confusion exists as to the definition of "turnover" per se. The origins of that confusion undoubtedly lie in the fact that the NHS is something of a monopoly employer for certain categories of health care workers. Hence whilst an individual may leave a particular health care position and be regarded as "wasted" and part of the labour turnover "problem" of a particular unit or employing authority they may be "leaving" merely to move to another, more suitable position at

another unit and still within the NHS. Further confusion stems from the fact that even those who resign from the NHS and leave the labour market completely, often do so with the intention of returning to work at some future date, and specifically with the intention of returning to work within the NHS, since it is the employer with a monopoly of employment for their particular profession, skills or training. Several surveys, including The Briggs Report (1972) have suggested that as many as half of all married nurses (for example) return to the profession after a break. Can such leavers therefore be regarded as "wastage" or "turnover" in the commonly understood sense, since they will presumably return and utilise their past experience, training and skills at some future, unspecified date? Such confusion confounds the considerable gaps which remain in our knowledge of why women do or do not continue to work in the health service. Claims that "the Health Service simply cannot afford to lose skilled and expensively trained staff" (Duncan Nichol, NHS Chief Executive, 1991) suggest that this is an area worthy of study.

But it is not merely the scale of women's employment in the NHS nor the lack of information on various aspects of that employment which makes the health service attractive and fertile as a field of study regarding employment decisions following maternity leave. This sector of employment is attractive also because it is unique in affording an opportunity to study a sample of women who are homogeneous, in that they all enjoy basically the same terms and conditions of employment, in particular in relation to maternity leave provision (being entitled to Contractual Occupational Maternity Pay [see above] which in Northern Ireland is almost exclusive to the public sector), sick leave entitlement, pension rights etc, but at the same time heterogeneous, not only in terms of

their differing personal preferences and circumstances, but also in the range of jobs they do; the types and levels of occupations in which they are engaged; the levels of training and qualifications which they will have acquired; the level of earnings they enjoy and their earnings potential for the future. Whilst a Catering Assistant and a Consultant Physician may therefore well have the same basic terms and conditions of employment and the same entitlements, their job content, career structures, training and earnings potential are clearly very different.

In a study which seeks to explore both the ways in which actors construct their decisions and the context in which those decisions are made, health and social service employment for all the reasons above, provides a unique opportunity to explore the widest possible range of variables within a controlled environment.

Summary

This chapter has endeavoured to set the scene for the study of women's employment decisions following maternity leave by describing the context in which the study took place. That is not to suggest that the economic, social, and structural factors described above are a mere backdrop to the study. Each of them in their own way undoubtedly influences the shape and extent of women's labour market participation and it is their interaction with, and influence upon, the attitudes of individuals which provides the complexity and richness of the study.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

The research whose findings form the core of this thesis was first proposed in 1992. The project was to be a study of first time mothers who were on maternity leave from the health service in Northern Ireland.

The broad aim of the research was to explore why some women, about 45% of those taking maternity leave according to McRae (1991), continue in employment following the birth of a child while others do not.

The rationale for this study has been considered in some detail in Chapter I. In the present context it will suffice to reiterate that interest stemmed from a perceived failure of previous studies to explore the multidimensional nature of the issues involved in mothers' employment decisions and the complexity of those decisions. A number of studies have sought to make sense of why some mothers work while others do not. By focusing on a limited range of variables either economic, or social-structural in nature, they have however tended to reduce explanations of employment decisions to the level of women's "reasons" for working. Decision-making of this kind is rarely so simple; a more comprehensive analysis was demanded and is attempted in the present study.

The previous studies, explored in detail in Chapter One, are helpful however, in that they did suggest a number of factors that may be especially significant for women's

employment decisions following maternity leave. From these it has been possible to construct a series of hypotheses suggesting a probabilistic relationship between certain factors and the likelihood of a woman returning to work. The factors suggested as relevant to the employment decision are:

- partner's employment and earnings;
- the individual's employment status, education and earnings;
- household financial arrangements;
- the "meaning" of work to the individual, ie. work orientation;
- partner's attitude and support;
- the degree of sharing of household and caring responsibilities;
- availability of "family-friendly" employment practices;
- availability of childcare facilities;

From these factors, and from the eight hypotheses constructed on the basis of them (as set out in Chapter One), it was possible to specify the data required to test the strength of various linkages and to examine the relative importance of each of the factors for women's employment decisions following maternity leave.

Having defined the hypotheses to be investigated, as set out in Chapter One, and having specified the data required for that investigation, the next concern was the design of the empirical research to collect and obtain such data.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Choices

There are many potential choices to be made in developing a research design which will achieve the objectives of a particular study, but few algorithms which can guide the researcher into making the ideal or even appropriate choices. The choices are important however. Methodological perspectives infuse all aspects of research processes, from the choice of questions, sampling strategies, data collection, through to analysis and interpretation of results. A number of the choices are also allied to philosophical positions and an awareness of this can at least help to ensure that the different elements of a research design are consistent with each other. For example the choice of whether to sample across a large number of people or situations or to focus on a small number and attempt to investigate them in depth will depend, in part at least, upon one's "philosophical" position in terms of a positivist or social constructionist approach. The choice as to whether the theory or the data should come first again represents the split between the positivist and phenomenological paradigms in relation to how the researcher should go about his or her work. So too does the choice between experimental designs or fieldwork.

In making the choices then one needs to be aware of underlying assumptions about what "matters" when trying to understand or explain aspects of social behaviour. Broadly one needs to decide whether it is the things themselves that are important or people's views about them, or indeed, as in the present study, whether both require a degree of attention and hence a combination or blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

A Methodological Blend

This study is a study of women and their experiences as both mothers and employees. Such experiences are characterised principally by diversity. Recognising such diversity it must be asked whether in fact any one research method or any one perspective, be it quantitative or qualitative, can be adequate to its exploration. It might perhaps be concluded that the interests of such a group are best served by researchers who are prepared to tailor their research methods to the diversities in which women's roles and experiences are embedded and to combine and blend methods where necessary.

Despite the arguments of some such as Filstead (1979), that quantitative and qualitative research methods are based upon fundamentally incompatible epistemological positions which make them mutually exclusive (Bryman, 1988), and despite too the costs, which can be an obstacle to bringing several methods to bear upon a specific issue, there are a number of advantages to be gained from combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The strength of qualitative data lies in its richness and depth; it can provide a wealth of information. Furthermore qualitative approaches allow participants to structure the world as they see it, rather than as the analyst sees it. The question "why"? as in this study of "why mothers return to work" often cannot be asked or answered directly and may involve a variety of circumstances and contextual factors creating links between, or choices between, apparently unrelated matters. Whether one is seeking explanations at the social-structural level, in this case in terms of employment practices and childcare provision, or at the level of individual attitudes, choices and lifestyles, in this case concerning women and their partners, qualitative research can be valuable for identifying

patterns of association between factors on the ground, as compared with abstract imputed correlations obtained from the analysis of large scale surveys and aggregate data. As a result researchers can come to quite a deep understanding of a particular topic.

Quantitative data on the other hand can describe the characteristics of a population as well as model statistically events and processes occurring within the population. When questionnaires and instruments are standardised researchers can argue for reliability.

Nevertheless quantitative data can reduce social or family processes to numbers, and hence studies relying purely on quantitative methods may suffer from superficiality and a failure to explain complex issues. Purely quantitative analyses seldom capture too the overall context and underlying mechanisms behind predicted events. Depending upon the research question then qualitative and quantitative analyses can be complementary, building on the strengths of both approaches.

A second advantage of blending qualitative and quantitative data in research design and analysis is the additional insights attained as the result of such an integration. Like theoretical perspectives specific methodological approaches are various ways of viewing and interpreting the world. They are not necessarily correct or incorrect, but rather they often grasp at different aspects of reality. A researcher studying the multidimensional nature of the influences upon women's employment decisions following maternity leave must have an interest in understanding such multiple dimensions of reality. By bringing together both qualitative and quantitative data in an analysis insights are gained that may be unattainable without such an integration.

Bryman (1988) discussed how combinations of methods can work together: "Quantitative research can establish regularities in social life while qualitative evidence can allow the processes which link the variables identified to be revealed" (p.142). This was the type of analysis utilised in the current study. The multidimensional nature of the research question required that quantitative analysis be used to establish the relationship between factors such as earnings or occupational level and the decision to return to employment. Qualitative analysis, using the medium of open-ended questions was used to gain insight into feelings, attitudes and concerns.

A further advantage of combining quantitative and qualitative data is the potential increment in the validity of the study's findings. Assuming researchers discover consistent results across the qualitative and quantitative methods, such findings acquire a greater validity. As Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest (1966) observed, "When a hypothesis can survive the confrontation of a series of complementary methods of testing, it contains a degree of validity unattainable by one tested within the more constricted framework of a single method" (p.174). Consistent findings across methods increase confidence in the results. In the present study, for example, data obtained from responses to the structured questionnaire suggested that employment practices and availability of childcare were significant influences in employment decisions and significant concerns for mothers. The comments and suggestions for change made in response to open ended questions almost universally reinforced these findings and enhanced their validity.

Having recognised the complexities, as well as the advantages, of a combined approach to the project, the decision was made to seek the information or data required, both

quantitative and qualitative, using a survey method.

The survey

Despite the fact that, as Turner and Martin (1981) tell us, if one "wants to know what people think and believe about their world and themselves there is no substitute for asking them directly", the decision to use a survey to collect data is not to be taken lightly. This was certainly so in the case of the present study where there were a number of areas of potential difficulty to be considered.

The nature of survey research is such that the data to be collected have to be specified in advance, except to the extent that open-ended questions may reveal the unexpected. This means that theories can only really be tested in any one survey if they have been formulated in advance, and this is not always an easy or straightforward process. The theories in the present study derived not only from a review of previous work in this area but also from an examination of the environment in which the study was to take place. Information gained from interviews with a number of the so-called "stake-holders", functional managers, human resource specialists, and employee representatives, was important in establishing definitions, assumptions and values relating to structural opportunities and constraints in particular. In incorporating such information in the formulation of theories, however, one had to guard against taking on "the nearsightedness which is such a marked aspect of a culture of practical men floundering in the search for little remedies for large troubles" (Lynd, 1939) and to recognise that the "causes" of any complex social situation, i.e. the circumstances without which it would have been different, are wide ranging and numerous. Theorising that does not recognise a sufficient

range of factors is likely to be conservative, both intellectually and politically, in the findings which it generates. This is cited earlier as one of the shortcomings of previous work in this area, which has focused solely upon either "economic" or "social-structural" factors as explanations of women's employment decisions following childbirth. Whilst it is recognised that something near to a full-set of the major factors or influences needs to be considered, such a task is daunting, however, in its span and its depth. Hence the attempt to "condense" the theories underpinning the current study in a series of eight propositions derived from previous work in the area together with views from those with experience of this environment. From the propositions thus formulated it has proved possible to specify the data to be obtained and to design interviews for the purpose of collecting such data.

In choosing survey research it was important too to be aware of a standard point about the potential weaknesses of such research. There are often reasons for doubting the accuracy of respondents' self-reports even when they are given in all good faith. An expressed attitude, for example, is often not directly predictive of the behaviour which might appear to follow from it, behaviour which can itself be affected by social pressures and by other attitudes. In this study, for example, it was very interesting to note that only 15.3% of women felt that mothers with preschool children should work but 72.3% said that they, as mothers of preschool children, intended to return to work. It is of course [possible for individuals to hold conflicting views without actually experiencing conflict. It is also, as Platt (1978) suggests, "dangerous to infer that wishes ... are expressed in behaviour; both positive social constraints and negative lack of opportunity may prevent their expression. Current behaviour may be taken as showing, by definition, the preferred adaptation to current circumstances but it cannot directly show what would

be the preferred adaptation to other circumstances or what circumstances would be preferred" (p.116). The study attempted to address this difficulty by questions at the end of the survey asking in what circumstances the women may have made a different decision, but it remains a concern nonetheless. It is also true of this type of research that there can be a confusion of behaviour with opinions. Even if people like their current behaviour patterns - which cannot be taken for granted - it does not follow that they would prefer them, or the underlying attitudes which they appear to express, to the alternatives available under different conditions.

These were especially relevant considerations to be borne in mind in this study where the "theory" was that a range of factors would be likely to influence women's employment decisions; where, because women were interviewed at a time when "the decision" had already been made, there was likely to be a degree of "post hoc rationalisation"; and where it seemed likely that behaviours governed attitudes, as much as they were governed by them. Whilst from a "positivistic" standpoint such concerns might almost serve to invalidate the research, from the standpoint adopted for the present study they provide important data in themselves. The fact that women may have been confused, or couldn't agree on what they meant by certain attitudes or opinions or the way they constructed particular situations, is actually in this case significant for the research.

It was clear from the outset of the study that the explanation for women's employment decisions would be multidimensional and the research design would have to address that issue. A further issue to address was the fact that, as often happens, the researcher and the "sponsors", in this case health service management, had rather different, although not irreconcilable expectations for the study. The researcher was interested in the somewhat

theoretical question of what influences women's employment decisions following maternity leave, the ways in which those factors influence how and why women make their decisions and the interaction between such factors. Health service managers on the other hand were primarily interested in why some women decided to leave employment following maternity leave and in how they might assist those who did decide to return to effectively and successfully combine work and family life. The research design chosen had to reflect these somewhat diverse interests and provide the best means of obtaining the information required to address these issues.

Whilst surveys are often criticised as providing only a superficial understanding of a problem it was decided that a survey, undertaken by means of face to face interviews, using a largely, though not exclusively, structured approach, could provide both the depth and quality of data required for the purposes specified above.

Interviews

Interviews have been characterised as conversations with a purpose. As a technique for qualitative research they can be used to gain insights regarding how individuals attend to, perceive or otherwise deal with some phenomenon of interest. The face-to-face interview was chosen in preference to other methods used in previous studies, for example the postal survey used by McRae (1991). This was because the postal survey, whilst appropriate to a study interested in the facts of what happened to women, in terms of their access to maternity leave and pay, was deemed inadequate to a study which sought to go beyond the factual situation to explore the meanings which such experiences held for women and why things happened as they did.

In choosing the interview as a method or technique it has to be recognised that it is dynamic and that dynamism is both a strength and a liability. The nature of the exchanges that take place between interviewer and respondent will be affected by such things as, the needs and behaviours of both parties, their relationship, the skill of the interviewer, the topics to be covered and the context in which the interview is taking place. The dynamism of the interview is a strength, in that it allows for flexibility and efficiency and for the researcher to pursue productive and appropriate lines of inquiry. There are however difficulties in imposing standardisation on the process and in ensuring that, across all interviews, all respondents will be faced with the same questions posed in the same manner. Even, as in the case of the present study, where a structured questionnaire was used as the basis for the interview, the way in which different interviewers related to respondents, or the same interviewer related to different respondents on different days and in different circumstances, may well have influenced, not only the manner in which questions were posed, but also how forthcoming interviewees were in their responses. Nonetheless the face to face interview method is appropriate in research with a qualitative focus because it establishes a relationship with the research subjects, which in turn allows for subtle adjustment of questioning, such as changes in the order of questions, clarification when required and of small, but important, matters such as voice tone or quality and non-verbal body cues. It also has advantages over simply handing out a questionnaire and hoping that it comes back completed correctly, in that the interviewer can help respondents by clarifying items and by motivating them to answer. However face to face interviews are time consuming and costly in travel terms. This was a particular consideration in the present study, since the majority of respondents chose to be interviewed at home, and "home" in rural Northern Ireland often meant quite a remote area reached by lengthy journey times, involving in

one case two hours to find one respondent. This did mean that more than one interviewer had to be involved. It also meant that the collection of information took longer than it might otherwise have done. But this was not a very great disadvantage since there only were a limited number of women at the fifteenth week of maternity leave at any given point in time. In addition to the standard disadvantages and constraints of the interview method of data collection there were a number of potential problems or areas of concern associated with the approach, which required at least a degree of awareness and in some cases precautionary measures.

As with most research of this type there was the potential "Hawthorne" effect of people changing their "attitudes" or "opinions" because they know they are being studied. This usually takes the form of acting in a more normative or idealised way, or in a manner consistent with what the actor thinks is expected by the researcher. Some mothers in this study, for example, may well have thought that they would be "expected" or "should" have different attitudes to work after having their baby if they were "a good mother".

There are the potential problems too of changes due to measurement - the very act of posing a question may alter the actor. Simply by asking a question about attitude change these interviews may have produced changes. Thus a weakness of obtaining self-reports through interviews is that the structure of the questions asked can unduly affect the way the respondent will think about a phenomenon. More to the point, if one was to go back to this same person her second set of answers would be different to some extent as an effect of past measurement. Hence in this study the "snapshot" approach may have had some advantages over a longitudinal study. A further consideration must be the fact that personal and obvious features of the interviewer, such as gender, age, manner of dress

etc will have effects on the respondent. This is based on assumptions the person might make about the interviewer and what the latter would be likely to agree with or reinforce through approval. In the present case respondents may well have felt that the interviewers as women would have had similar experiences to their own in relation to maternity leave, the stress of juggling family and employment concerns, sleepless nights etc. and therefore could empathise with their situation, perhaps assuming that for this reason some things could be left unsaid. Interviewees will "suss out" what interviewers are like and make judgements from their first impressions about whether the interviewer can be trusted. Such suspicions may not mean that the interviewee will refuse to be interviewed but it might mean, as Jones (1985) suggests, that they just "seek to get the interview over as quickly as possible with enough detail and enough feigned interest to satisfy the researcher that he or she is getting something of value but without saying anything that touches the core of what is actually believed" (p.50).

A further point to be recognised is the fact that the quality of the data produced by most qualitative techniques, including interviews, is a function of the skill and conscientiousness of the investigator. To some extent in interviews the interviewer herself, or himself, becomes the instrument and of course the process of repeated use of human instruments can bring about changes. Interviewers can get better at asking questions as a result of practice. Alternatively though, and this was certainly experienced from time to time in the present study, after many interviews the interviewer needs to guard against anticipating answers to certain questions and against a tendency to "switch off" from really listening.

Structured v Unstructured Interviews

In deciding to use a structured questionnaire as the basis for the interviews consideration had to be given to what might be lost, in terms of depth and quality of data, as against using an unstructured, free ranging format. The decision in favour of a structured approach was based on a number of considerations. Firstly it was seen as one way of ensuring that the same questions would be asked of all participants, regardless of who was conducting the interviews. Whilst the subtleties of interaction with the respondent, the tone of voice and manner used were difficult to control, at least the precise wording of questions could be assured. The use of a structured questionnaire was also seen as a means of reducing the very heavy physical, emotional and intellectual demands placed upon the interviewer by an unstructured interview, in which the researcher is almost totally responsible for the quality, validity and accuracy of the data. Using a structured questionnaire can help to reduce note-taking in interviews. Since it was felt that continuous note-taking or tape-recording would cause some individuals to be more self-conscious, or even uncomfortable, and would reduce spontaneity, perhaps leading to self-censorship, it was considered advantageous to use the questionnaire. It was recognised too that in the situation of the completely unstructured interview it takes much time and trust to discover so-called "presentational data" (Van Maanen, 1983), that is, idealised or manufactured images presented to outsiders and designed to protect one's self-esteem and one's personal situation - "people lie about those things that matter most to them" (p.544). Whilst this cannot be totally avoided by the use of a structured interview at least it helps to reduce the time and effort which must be spent by the interviewer in "penetrating fronts". A further disadvantage of adopting a totally unstructured approach to the interviews was felt to be the tendency for one's beliefs and expectations to guide

attention, colour perceptions and shape inferences and conclusions. Because in unstructured interviews what gets recorded and emphasised is largely a function of the investigator, it is quite possible that the final product reflects the latter's biases as much as the reality of the phenomenon. Since the researcher was personally conducting the vast majority of the interviews this was felt to be an important consideration in deciding to adopt a more structured approach. Whilst research with a qualitative dimension cannot (and perhaps should not) be value-free, it is nonetheless necessary to be aware of, and to acknowledge, such dangers and to build in, wherever possible, mechanisms to deal with them. Such problems are minimised by a more heavy reliance on structure in interviews.

The final, and it must be acknowledged, one of the most significant considerations in the decision to conduct structured interviews, came from the pragmatic point that it was hoped to obtain information or data that could readily be analysed, possibly by computer. The structured interview in this respect presents far fewer problems of analysis than the data arrived at via purely qualitative insights, since the response options of participants can be, and largely were, translated into numbers for analysis, in this case using SPSS. Whilst for quantitative data there are clear conventions for analysis, for the purely qualitative data produced by unstructured interviews there are "very few guidelines for protection against self delusion let alone presentation of 'unreliable' or 'invalid' conclusions" (Miles, 1979, p.590).

Despite all such concerns regarding the use of unstructured, in depth interviews which tend to "go with the flow", the limitations of a purely structured approach must also be acknowledged. The research design chosen was a combination, or a blend, in many

respects, including the format which was accepted for interviews. Since there was a concern to produce rich, full and holistic data, which would match to some degree the complexity of the issues being studied, data which may not always be achieved by a structured approach, it was decided to include at interview two final open-ended questions inviting suggestions for change and comments on any aspect of the topics under consideration. In the event the responses to these questions, from 54.5% and 46.5% of respondents respectively, have proved valuable. Combined with the other findings they produce more valid inferences and add credibility. As such it has been useful to present these responses as illustrations or vignettes in the text.

NEGOTIATING ACCESS

The Original Proposal

The reasons for choosing health service employees in particular as the subjects for this study have been explored in detail in Chapter Two. In summary, the reasons were firstly that the National Health Service is the largest employer of women in Europe and hence an important source of data for those interested in many aspects of women's employment. The health service is also attractive as a field of study because it affords opportunities to study women who, although as diverse as any other group in terms of personal preferences, abilities and circumstances, are largely homogeneous in terms of their employment conditions and in particular in relation to their rights to maternity provisions.

In order to study women in the health service, however, it was necessary to obtain a sample, something which, in practice required the assistance of the Northern Ireland

Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS).

The initial proposal discussed with officers of the Department in September 1992 was for a study similar in structure - albeit with a different focus, in that it was to be concerned more with meanings than with facts - to that undertaken by McRae (1991) in Great Britain.

The proposal was for a study of women's employment decisions following maternity leave using a representative sample of first-time mothers who, prior to the birth had been employed in the health services in Northern Ireland on whatever basis, full-time, part-time, job-sharing, etc., in a full range of health service occupations. It was assumed that the DHSS, being the funding and monitoring body for the province's four health and social services boards, would either have, or could obtain access to maternity leave records. McRae and her colleagues at the Policy Studies Institute had gained access to their sample through the records of the Department of Social Security in Newcastle and had met the requirements of Data Protection legislation with co-operation from the DSS in preparing code numbered address labels etc. The Data Protection Act was not, however, the only obstacle to be surmounted in the Northern Ireland situation. The DHSS was willing and able to provide figures for the number of employees who had taken maternity leave from the health service over each of the past three years. It was also able to provide a breakdown of the leave figures between the four boards specifically since it had recently engaged in a monitoring exercise in response to concerns raised by the Public Accounts Committee at Westminster. The Department was even able to give an indication of labour turnover and of the numbers who had resigned from the boards for family or personal reasons. What the DHSS Northern Ireland was neither able nor

willing to do was to provide access to information on health service employees currently on maternity leave. This inability to provide access was explained by the fact that, although the Department funded employment in the health service in Northern Ireland, it was not "the employer". Each individual employed was under contract to one of the area boards in the province. The board was the employer and hence only the board could grant access to employee records and thus potentially to employees. The DHSS was willing to give its blessing to the research but little more.

This initial setback, whilst disappointing, was not as serious as it first seemed. Clearly access could only be obtained through a direct approach to a health and social services board. Fortunately this was relatively straightforward given the strength of professional and social networks in the small and tightly-knit Northern Ireland community and was made through a Personnel Director at one of the Boards.

At a series of meetings which took place in late 1992 and early 1993 management within the accessible Board articulated a number of concerns relating in particular to staff turnover, described as "wastage", amongst staff resigning, often during maternity leave, for personal or family reasons, and to levels of sickness absence following maternity leave. Both of these issues were proving costly in an era of restricted public expenditure, and at a time when staffing costs were increasingly significant for the competitive position of units in the proposed "internal market" for health care provision. In meetings and discussions which took place with human resource specialists, functional managers, in particular from nursing and midwifery, and representatives of trade unions and professional bodies, such as UNISON and the Royal College of Nursing, the environment for the study was explored in some depth, mutual interests were established and hence

co-operation in identifying the sample was readily obtained.

It was broadly agreed that the sample should be representative of all women employed on whatever basis, full-time, part-time, job-sharing etc in a full range of health service occupations.

Based on statistics for the previous three years it was estimated that there were just over three hundred and fifty applications for maternity leave from Board employees each year (approximately 6.5 % of the workforce), enough it seemed to provide an adequate sample of around five hundred for the study to be undertaken over an eighteen month period. This was considered viable even if, as agreed after much discussion, the study was restricted to first-time mothers.

First-time mothers

The decision to focus upon first-time mothers was made for a number of reasons, some purely pragmatic, others with a more "philosophical" basis. Firstly, the majority of women taking maternity leave were in any case likely to be first-time mothers. The PSI study (McRae, 1991) found that 78% of mothers having their first child had been in employment twelve months before the birth compared with about one third of women who had a second or subsequent child. First-time mothers were also substantially more likely to have been working on a full-time basis. Hence it seemed sensible to focus upon the category who were in any event likely to provide the majority for the sample. But there were other less pragmatic reasons for choosing first-time mothers instead of looking at all women on maternity leave. Prominent amongst these was the assumption that the

range of factors potentially influencing the decisions of first-time mothers would be wider than that faced by an "experienced" mother. It seemed likely that those making the decision to return to work following childbirth for the first time would be confronting ideological factors affecting their own attitudes to work and to working mothers, their partners' attitudes and those of employers, as well as structural opportunities and constraints such as the state of household finances, employment practices and availability of childcare support. Mothers with more than one child might be assumed to have "been through all that" first time round. Indeed McRae's study (1991), which found that women who had at least one child at the time of their recent baby's birth were more likely to return to work than first time mothers, suggests that "this reflects decisions taken earlier by these women to combine paid employment with being a mother and the likelihood of such women having already in place arrangements to facilitate their continuing employment" (p.229). Hence the judgement was made that, in a study of how and why decisions come to be made regarding employment following childbirth, such women would be less interesting than first-time mothers.

Practical considerations

It was agreed that the researcher would design a questionnaire which, as well as seeking to test a range of theories and hypotheses derived from a review of previous work in the area, would also reflect the interests of other "stakeholders" such as health service management and unions. These interests related primarily to why some women decided to leave employment following maternity leave and also how those who did decide to return might be assisted to effectively and successfully combine work and family life. The Assistant Director of Personnel and a number of management and trade union

colleagues were to be given an opportunity to comment upon the questionnaire prior to its use in a small pilot survey.

At a very practical level it was agreed that at twelve week intervals, for the duration of the study, the human resources departments at headquarters and each of the board's units would generate a list of names of those who had applied for maternity leave within that period, together with a note of when their leave might be expected to commence. The list would then be scrutinised and those who did not meet the selection criteria of being first-time mothers, having been identified from personnel records as having previous maternity leave, would be rejected. Those remaining would be contacted by the human resources department (Appendix 1) informed of the survey and given the choice of "opting out", thus meeting the requirements of Data Protection legislation. The names of those who did not opt out would be passed to the researcher. These women would be contacted by the researcher, told a little more about the survey, asked if they would "positively" agree to participate and asked to give details of their expected date of confinement, plus a contact telephone number (Appendix 2). Those who had actively agreed to participate would be contacted and an appropriate interview date arranged, depending upon the age of their child and the length of time they had been on maternity leave.

Timing of interviews

The length of time on maternity leave was considered to be of some significance, and after much debate and consultation the decision was made to interview women around the 15th week of maternity leave. This choice was made for a number of reasons.

It was felt that by that stage in maternity leave, when most of the children would be in the age range of 6-11 weeks, most mothers would have made a "definite" decision on whether or not to return to work and would have had time to consider at least the immediate implications of that decision. It was also felt that by that time the dependency needs of the infants would have lessened (at least marginally) and hence mothers would be freer to participate in interviews. The decision to interview at the 15th week was in part a compromise, stemming largely from resource constraints. Clearly a longitudinal study would have had advantages over the design chosen and it was recognised that, by interviewing women at a time when a definite decision had already been made, there was a danger of responses, especially those to questions on attitudes and experiences of work, being subject to a degree of post hoc rationalisation (C. Wright Mills, 1979). Explanations may well be advanced to explain their decisions in terms which are acceptable to their own perceptions and which they regard as intelligible to others. It was recognised too that despite the "intention" to resume work, a number of those doing so might not remain in employment beyond the few months required for maternity pay purposes, because of unforeseen constraints in terms of childcare arrangements, domestic circumstances or health reasons.

However, the other timings considered for interviews had, it seemed, even greater disadvantages. It was not considered useful to interview women before the birth of their child since it seemed likely that attitudes to work and domestic arrangements could both be influenced and altered by the emotional and practical implications of a young child in the home. Nor did it seem practical to interview women very soon after the birth of the child. The alternative strategy of interviewing women on their actual return to work was considered for returners, with a similar timescale for non-returners. This was rejected

in favour of the "15th week" interview on the grounds that having returned to work, or settled into a non-employed regime, women would be more likely to have lost sight of the fact that they had gone through a decision-making process and had been required to make a decision, as opposed to accepting their return or non-return as a foregone conclusion.

Pilot Study

The draft questionnaire was modified to include questions suggested by the human resource staff on creche charges (Appendix 3). The design was subsequently agreed and the first list of maternity leave applicants was generated. Those who were eligible and had not opted out, i.e. twenty-three women, were contacted and, of these, twenty agreed to take part in the study. They represented a spread of health service occupations but the largest profession, nursing, dominated and provided thirteen of the twenty respondents. Interviews took place at the respondents' homes during July and August 1993. The participants in this pilot study were all interviewed by the researcher and were encouraged to raise any issues that required clarification from the survey in general and from the interviews in particular. The pilot study was useful in that, amongst other things, it gave an indication of the likely duration of interviews, anything from 40 minutes to almost two hours, and hence an indication of the workload involved and the resources required for the study. It also produced a number of "technical" amendments to the questionnaire in terms of the numbering of items and instructions for "branching", where some items were not applicable to particular groups of respondents. Overall, however, the data produced from the pilot seemed adequate to meet the objectives of the study and generated sufficient optimism to make the larger project seem worthwhile.

EVOLUTION OF A PROJECT

Modifications and Changes

Hakim (1987) has described research as being "in the nature of sailing off to chart unexplored seas or ... to map unexplored territories" (p.171). Because of that uncharted aspect each research project has its own history, which does not necessarily conform to the original proposal. Change may be forced on the researcher because of practical problems in implementing a design, or it may be the result of changes in perspectives and thinking over a period of time. In practice the two may interact. Practical problems may reflect the real world intruding on unrealistic assumptions or expectations leading the researcher to re-evaluate what she is doing.

In some, indeed most, important respects this project followed the original design quite closely but a number of modifications were necessary, in terms of both the size and composition of the sample.

Sample size

The originally proposed sample size of approximately 500 women, which had been based on Maternity Leave statistics of approximately 350 applications each year, or 6.5% of the Board's workforce, hence just over 500 in an eighteen month long study, was not achieved. That sample was originally to be representative of all women employed throughout the health and social services board area on whatever basis full-time, part-time

etc and across the full range of health service occupations.

Prior to commencement of the main study however, during 1993/94, a number of units within the area acquired self-governing trust status or quasi trust status and became independent of the Board, other than in a provider to purchaser relationship. Staff who had formerly been Board employees became, in the majority, employees of individual health care trusts. Whilst the Directors of Human Resources for the largest trusts continued to co-operate with the project, it was no longer possible to gain access to all maternity leave applicants within the area formerly covered by the Health and Social Services Board. It was also necessary to renegotiate with officers of the trust some of the support which had been agreed with the human resources department at Board Headquarters such as the intervals for generating lists of applicants for example, and this delayed the commencement of the main survey by some four months.

Table 3.1 - Summary of Sample Achieved	
Total Maternity Leave Applications (March 1994 - September 1995)	328
Ineligible for Study (not first-time mothers)	84
Eligible	244
Opted-out	10
Contacted by Researcher	234
No Response	26
Responded to Researcher	208
Interview Refused	6
Sample Achieved	202

Table 3.1 above shows that within the Trusts which continued to support the project there were 328 staff on maternity leave in the period March 1994 to September 1995. This was an average of 6.8% of the overall workforce and 8.2% of the female workforce. Of these, 84 were automatically ineligible. They did not meet the selection criteria of

being first time mothers, having been identified from personnel records as having previous maternity leave. Some 244 women were identified as eligible for inclusion in the sample. Clearly some rethinking was required, and decisions had to be made, when it became clear that the sample size was to be reduced by this turn of events. It was recognised that the original sample size could still be achieved perhaps by extending the timescale of the project by a further fifteen months. Two factors influenced the decision to adhere to the original timescale. Firstly resource considerations were significant. Access was in itself regarded as a valuable resource and, given the rapid pace of change in the healthcare sector, this could not be guaranteed in the long term, nor could the goodwill of the human resource department staff, who were putting considerable time and effort into the project. Other resources in finite supply included the researcher's time and the financial resources required, for travel expenses in particular. The second factor influencing the decision related to the dynamic nature of the issues involved, and again, the somewhat volatile nature of employment in healthcare at this time. Discussions regarding decentralisation of bargaining and the introduction of local terms and conditions of employment were already advanced and it seemed likely that homogeneity of employment conditions, including those relating to pregnancy and maternity, could not be guaranteed beyond the next financial year. Hence the decision to proceed on the originally agreed timescale, despite the smaller sample and all the associated concerns of how representative the sample would be.

That decision having been made, as had been previously agreed, every twelve weeks or so for the duration of the study the human resources departments generated a list of thirty or more names of those who had applied for maternity leave, together with a note of when their leave might be expected to commence (Appendix 4). Each woman was

contacted by the Human Resources Department (Appendix 1) informed of the survey and given the choice of "opting out". A surprisingly small number, ten in all, did opt out at this stage, and the names and addresses of those who had "agreed" to take part were then passed to the researcher. These women were contacted, told a little more about the survey, asked if they would "positively" agree to participate and asked to give details of their expected date of confinement plus a contact telephone number (Appendix 2). Again a surprisingly small number, twenty-six, failed to return the slip with this information and a further six, perhaps even more surprisingly, replied indicating that they did not wish to participate. Two of the "non-participants" gave quite detailed reasons for refusing to do so. One who did not respond until after the birth, had had a Down's Syndrome baby and felt, understandably, incapable of talking as she put it, "sensibly" to anyone at that point in time. The other, married to an Army Officer, had been given notice of a "posting" to England and regretfully could not guarantee that she would be available for interview at the appropriate time. Those who had actively agreed to participate, a final overall sample of 202 women, i.e. 82.8% of those eligible, were contacted and an appropriate interview date arranged. (see Appendix 6 - Note re Anonymity)

Composition of the sample

The second modification necessary as the project evolved related to the composition of the sample.

It was originally intended that the sample should be representative of women employed in a full range of health and social service occupations. Again this aspiration was the victim of changing circumstances. During the period prior to the survey a number of

services within the trusts, in particular the so-called "ancillary" services of catering, cleaning and portering were subject to Compulsory Competitive Tendering and were "privatised". Whilst many of the women engaged in these occupations continued to work in the trusts and units covered by the study they were no longer health service employees, nor did they, despite the supposed safeguards embodied in Tupe, continue to enjoy all the terms and conditions of employment afforded to health service employees. Hence, even if access to such women had been granted by the private sector catering and cleaning firms who were now their employers, which was in itself doubtful, they would not have met the selection criteria for the study. Whilst some ancillary workers, largely in laundry and CSSD, did appear in the sample the discussion of the occupational characteristics of the study group which follows, in Chapter 4, does indicate that ancillary grades, and therefore almost by definition lower paid workers, are under-represented and this is a matter of some regret.

Final Plan

The original proposal had been for a study of the employment decisions of women who were first-time mothers, currently on maternity leave from the health service in Northern Ireland. Based on the maternity leave statistics of the area board participating in the study a sample size of 500 women was proposed. The sample was to be representative of the full-range of health service occupations, whether women were employed full-time, part-time, job-sharing, etc.

As a result of the modifications and changes described above the final study involved 202 women employed by healthcare trusts and units within one health and social services

board area. Whilst the sample represented both full and part-time employees it was not, for reasons discussed above, (see "composition of sample") representative of the full-range of health service occupations. In particular, ancillary grades, such as catering and cleaning staff, were not represented in the sample.

CONDUCT OF THE SURVEY

Participation Rates

The low attrition rate from the sample was noted above. Before embarking upon a description of the fieldwork involved this participation rate is perhaps worthy of further comments, since a number of factors may have contributed to the co-operation achieved. The perceived value of the research was undoubtedly of some significance. From the initial correspondence (Appendix 1) with potential respondents it seems likely that most regarded it to be, at the very least, for a "good cause", and many perceived that they might personally benefit from its outcome, as there was the possibility of it producing results in support of carer-friendly employment practices and of childcare provision. The fact that their employer (or former employer) supported the research and wrote to potential respondents to that effect may also have encouraged participation. There were also obvious dangers here, in that knowledge of employer interest may have created some bias and individuals, despite assurances of confidentiality, may have, in some instances, distorted answers to produce what they perceived as a desired response.

The fact that the research was to be conducted by a woman who was independent of their employer and from a recognised institution may have counteracted this effect to some

degree and may also have helped the response rate. In addition the support given by Trade Unions, such as UNISON, and professional bodies such as RCN and RCM who publicised the research at meetings, may have helped the response rate. A final factor in producing a favourable response may well have been the researcher's willingness to travel to interview women in their homes. This overcame many of the practical difficulties which women with very young babies, sometimes living in remote rural areas, might otherwise have experienced in taking part in the research. It also seemed to give women confidence to be on their own home ground where they were in control of events and felt able to speak their minds. A number, it should be said, seemed to welcome the research visits as a source of company, and even of support, in otherwise rather isolated situations, and many saw the interview as a welcome opportunity, perhaps their first, to reflect on and review experiences and feelings.

The nine people who chose to be interviewed at the hospitals where they had worked did so because they were going there for another appointment or to see friends, because they lived in a particularly remote area, or because they were self conscious about "the state of the house". In all these cases the interviews seemed to be a little more superficial or inhibited than those conducted at home.

Fieldwork - The Setting for Interviews

Mothers were interviewed using a questionnaire (Appendix 3) which included, in the main, structured questions which were precoded, together with some open-ended questions which offered possibilities for views to be presented freely and more spontaneously on a wide range of issues associated with maternity and employment. The

interviews, which took place between May 1994 and September 1995, lasted from forty-minutes to one hour and forty-five minutes. In all but nine cases the respondents chose to be interviewed at home, largely one suspects because of the very practical demands of new babies, but also it seemed because they felt confident and at ease on "their own territory".

"Home", as might be expected given the diversity of respondents' personal circumstances, varied considerably from person to person and place to place. In one case it meant the cramped conditions of a Housing Executive flat on a somewhat rundown estate, where the interview was punctuated by the thud of a ball against a graffiti adorned gable wall. In another it resembled a building site as renovations to the house proceeded a pace, and a plumber demanded at least as much attention as the interviewer. In a number of other cases home was a farmhouse in varying degrees of rural splendour. In almost every case respondents had attempted to set aside both time and space for the interview, with babies often banished to an adjacent room. A number of women had, however, anticipated the inevitable interruption from an infant whose siesta did not last long, and had arranged to have a mother or mother-in-law in the house to "lift" the baby when required. Where no "granny" was available interviews sometimes had to be put on hold whilst babies were soothed, fed, changed or winded. In such cases the length of interview recorded in the field notes was usually well in excess of one hour. In one case the interviewer was even engaged in a lengthy consultation with an anxious mother regarding the likely nature of a baby's spots!

Husbands or partners were at home in a minority of cases, twenty-seven in all, and usually when mothers had specified an evening interview as most suitable. A number of

men who were teachers or academics were at home on holiday when interviews took place, and two husbands on shift work were especially memorable for the quality of their cups of tea. A few partners were frankly curious about the nature and purpose of the research and talked to the researcher at some length, either before or after the formal interview. The majority expressed views in support of their wife's employment decision, although almost all were keen to stress that it had been her own decision. Of those whose partners were at home at the time of the interview just one woman wanted her husband, a teacher, to be present in the room where it was conducted. Although he took no part in answering questions this produced a somewhat strained atmosphere as the interviewer struggled to achieve a balance between ignoring and being polite to this third party. The interviewee, however, seemed to feel it appropriate and important that her partner should be present in a supporting role.

Response at Interviews

Interviews were conducted in the main by the researcher, who interviewed one hundred and fifty-one respondents, she was assisted by a part-time postgraduate student who interviewed fifty-one. At the outset of each interview the respondents were given some more information about the nature and purpose of the research, to supplement what they already knew from correspondence. They were reassured that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions being asked and that they did not have to answer anything with which they were uncomfortable. They were reminded that our concern was in the facts of their own situation and in understanding their particular feelings, experiences and behaviours. They were assured also that our affiliation was to the research institution and not to their employer, although we did have the cooperation and support of the employer.

The anonymity of the questionnaire was stressed as was the fact that all responses would be confidential.

The responses from the vast majority of women were characterised by what appeared to be frankness and in some cases almost eagerness. Despite assurances that they did not have to answer any question with which they felt uncomfortable or had difficulty, only three respondents said they would prefer not to answer a particular question. In two cases women did not want to discuss their partner's earnings and one other did not want to describe the household's financial management system.

Many women were themselves prepared to volunteer information about sensitive issues, such as the attitudes of colleagues and a perceived lack of job commitment amongst mothers with young children, or the attitudes of more traditional family members. Again many such comments are noted in the findings from the two open-ended questions inviting comments and suggestions for change.

In addition to the questionnaire responses, at the conclusion of each interview brief diary notes were made describing the setting in which the interviews took place, others present, interruptions etc, the physical conditions, the surrounding area, length of interview and journey times.

Summary

This was a study of women and their experiences as both mothers and employees. As

observed above, such experiences are characterised principally by diversity. Obtaining a sample, the study of which would yield data of sufficient richness and depth to reflect that diversity, was a challenge in itself, as may be deduced from the description of the journey from "original proposal" to "final plan".

Deciding upon a research design which would provide the information required to address the many considerations and issues raised by this study, and which would avoid as many as possible of the pitfalls of such investigation, was also a daunting task. It has been something of an iterative process which has gone to and fro interchanging information and model-building. In its final form the research design was a blend which took account of what was required, as well as of resource constraints and what was "do-able". As such it had a number of limitations, which are discussed in the "Reflections on Research" of the final Chapter, but in broad terms it has met the requirements of the study.

CHAPTER 4

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The main aim of the empirical research for this study was to collect data about the employment decisions of women who had recently become mothers.

From the information available on women in the Northern Ireland labour market it is clear that the majority of all female employees (52%) are employed in the public sector (Northern Ireland Annual Abstract of Statistics 1993). Of those public sector employees the greatest number, more than 39,500 women, work in health services. It was therefore decided to look to the health sector to build up a sample of women on the basis of their employment prior to childbirth and their status as first-time mothers. Random sampling of the 3,000 plus women who will annually apply for maternity leave in the health services in Northern Ireland was not practical because of difficulties of access, data protection restrictions and resource constraints. The alternative strategy adopted was to seek respondents from one of the four health board areas where access could be readily afforded. In adopting such a strategy the issue of bias, of producing a sample which was not truly representative, was always recognised. The design of this study, however, did not require a representative sample. The main intention was to achieve a sample, on the basis of pre-maternity employment and first-time motherhood.

That having been said, it was considered useful in describing the characteristics of the

sample eventually achieved, to compare them, so far as possible, to those of the samples used in other studies of new mothers and, more generally to that used in a study of women in employment in Northern Ireland. The samples with which comparisons are drawn are; firstly, the nationally representative sample of 4,991 mothers used by McRae (1991) in the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) study of "Maternity Rights in Britain". Secondly the sample is compared to the sample of 255 mothers obtained by Brannen and Moss (1991) for their study of "Dual Earner Households after Maternity Leave" - although this too is not a truly representative sample in terms of occupational distribution of respondents. Finally comparisons are made to the representative sample of 1,000 women of working age used by Kremer and Montgomery (1993) to study "Women's Working Lives" in Northern Ireland (WWLS). The decision to use the sample from this latter work for comparative purposes was justified by the fact that Northern Ireland is known to differ from the rest of the UK in a number of important economic and social respects which will, in their different ways, impact upon women's experiences of work and their patterns of employment. Comparisons made between the sample achieved in the present study and women in general in Northern Ireland may therefore be more telling and more significant in some respects than comparisons made with statistics for the UK as a whole.

Age of Sample

Women in the current study had just given birth for the first time and so might have been expected to be younger than mothers generally. They were in fact mostly older than their counterparts in the PSI sample, with an average age of 29.3 years compared to 27.7 years

in the earlier study. This may reflect a trend, noted since the 1970s, towards postponing motherhood until at least the late twenties. The average age of married women at first birth has risen from 24.3 years in 1964 to 26.5 years in 1987 and 28.3 years in 1994, the highest recorded since 1938 (Social Trends, 1996). Since 1992 women in their early thirties have been more likely to have a baby than women in their early twenties. Women aged 25-29 are still the most likely to give birth with a rate of 112 births per thousand in 1994. The fertility rate for women in their late thirties, however, increased by two-thirds between 1981 and 1994. This has been attributed in part to an increase in age at marriage and to a fall in the number of births in the early years of marriage.

The age distribution of mothers shown in Table 4.1 below reflects this trend and shows an even greater concentration of births to mothers in the 26-35 age group, some 85.7% of the total, than is experienced for Northern Ireland as a whole, where 61% of births were to mothers in this age group (NI Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1994).

Table 4.1 - Age Distribution of Sample	
<i>Age Group</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 21	-
21 - 25	7.9
26 - 30	43.6
31 - 35	42.1
Over 35	6.4
Total	100.0
N	202*

* N = 202 in all tables referring to the sample

Table 4.1 also shows fewer mothers in the younger age groups, under 21 and 21-25, who are 7.9% of the total, than for Northern Ireland as a whole, where 27.4% of mothers are

in these age groups. The generally older age profile for mothers in this sample compared to both the earlier PSI study and to Northern Ireland statistics may be attributed in part to a desire amongst these women to postpone motherhood until a career had been established. This was certainly true of all the doctors interviewed, none of whom was under the age of thirty-five and two of whom commented that "although (I) should have known better" they had deferred pregnancy until the late thirties/early forties. In one case it had been deferred until the woman had acquired a consultant post; in the other until, as a senior registrar, she had completed the rotational training in her speciality, which she felt would have been nigh on impossible with a young child. Such training involved six monthly, or at best annual, changes in location and hence maximum mobility. More than a quarter (27.7%) of those in the managerial and professional groupings were over 35 years and the majority of women in that category (61 %) were aged 31-35 years.

The absence of mothers in the under twenty-one age group, and the few, sixteen in all, in the under twenty-five age group, perhaps reflects the fairly lengthy training periods associated with most health care occupations. A number of the registered nurses, who formed the largest single occupational group within the sample (see Table 4.4 below), commented that they had not married until their training (at least three years duration) was completed. A similar situation was likely to pertain, with even more lengthy training periods, for groups such as radiographers and physiotherapists. Added to this deferral of marriage is the fact that, as shown above, fewer births now occur in the early years of marriage. In this "associate professional" group 40% of women were aged 31-35 years.

Age of Child

The age of children at the time of their mother's interview (Table 4.2 below), whilst not directly a characteristic of the sample *per se* is nonetheless worthy of comment in passing.

Table 4.2 - Age of Child	
Age	%
< 4 weeks	1.0
4 weeks	1.0
5 weeks	2.5
6 weeks	7.9
7 weeks	18.3
8 weeks	9.9
> 8 weeks	59.4
Total	100.0

In planning interviews for around the fifteenth week of maternity leave it had been anticipated, as described in Chapter 3, that the majority of infants would be at least six weeks old and hence a little less dependent than in earlier weeks. It came as something of a surprise to discover that the majority (59.4%) were more than eight weeks old. Almost a quarter of all babies were in fact more than eleven weeks old. In discussion with mothers a strategy emerged of trying to work as long as possible up to the expected date of confinement, in order to have the greater portion of their maternity leave after the birth, and hence more time at home with the baby. Initially, accounts of women working to within two or three weeks of the birth, especially in occupations such as nursing,

which involved a considerable degree of manual work, appeared quite shocking. On reflection however it seems entirely logical, given a relatively short period of paid maternity leave, and the fact that mothers are, naturally, anxious to maximise time with their children. Many commented that they "could not" have left the baby any earlier. A number commented on the anticipated difficulties of weaning breast-fed babies, even at the age of three months, and felt that it would be "unfair" to do so earlier. Although a few did comment that it had been tiring to work full-time in the latter stages of pregnancy, all of these women were first-time mothers and many felt that they would just have been sitting at home with very little to do, hence they were better at work, before the birth. Now that the baby had arrived they had their hands full and could make better use of the time available to them. The fact that they were first time mothers was seen as significant in this respect, even to the mothers themselves, a number of whom commented that, although they had worked up to the birth this time, they would be unlikely to do so in any subsequent pregnancy with already one child to care for.

Marital Status

Northern Ireland has one of the lowest rates of births outside marriage in the UK, just one in ten compared to, for example, 38% of births in Northwest England (Social Trends, 1996). Similarly the divorce rate of 3.3 per thousand couples is much lower than that for England and Wales (13.5) and Scotland (12.8) (General Register Office, 1994). Whilst the women in this sample were not asked directly about their marital status, only two, in response to questions relating to husband or partner's employment and attitudes, declared that they did not have a partner at the time of interview. This does not

automatically mean of course that the other two hundred women were legally married. On the basis of what is known of the sample, however, it does seem that there were fewer births outside marriage in this group than might have been expected even from the Northern Ireland average. It is possible that the residential location of the respondents may be of some significance. In the rural areas and small towns in which the majority of the sample were located, attitudes to births outside marriage may well be more traditional and conservative, with greater stigma attached, than in the relatively more cosmopolitan greater Belfast area, which is home to the bulk of Northern Ireland's population.

Partners' Employment

The fact that 92.6% of the sample had a husband or partner who was in employment is another somewhat unusual characteristic and worthy of comment, given the Northern Ireland context of 13% male unemployment. So too is the fact that only 17.6% of the sample had a partner who had been unemployed in the past five years. The WWLS in contrast to this notes that only 79.2% of women in its sample had a partner in employment (Kremer and Montgomery, 1993). The explanation for this apparent disparity perhaps lies in the increasingly polarised nature of the Northern Ireland economy and of society here. The province has, relatively speaking, more of both dual-earner and non-earner households than elsewhere in the UK, but this polarisation of "haves and have-nots" has been noted in Britain too in the context of parental employment. Harrop and Moss (1995) comment that, throughout the UK, the net effect of trends in parental employment during the 1980s has been an increase in the proportion

of both "no-earner" families rising from 12% to 16% and of "dual-earner" families from 40% to 48%. This squeeze produced a fall in traditional one-earner, usually male breadwinner, families from 48% to 36%. The women in this sample were themselves either currently, or recently, in paid employment and so, as in the national picture, they were more likely to have an employed partner than women in general. The wives of unemployed men are themselves more likely to be unemployed forming a "no-earner" family. Table 4.3 below shows that the majority of women (53.8%) in the sample had partners who earned less than £250 per week (net) and a significant proportion, 28%, earned less than £200 per week, reflecting the median for male earnings in Northern Ireland of £183 per week (net) (Northern Ireland Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1993).

Table 4.3 - Partners Earnings	
<i>Earnings per week (net)</i>	<i>%</i>
£125 - £150	3.0
£151 - £200	25.4
£201 - £250	25.4
£251 - £300	24.8
£301 - £400	6.9
£401 - £500	4.5
Over £500	4.5
Don't Know	5.5
Total	100.0

Occupations

Table 4.4 - Occupational Distribution of Sample	
<i>Occupation</i>	<i>%</i>
Managers and Administrators	1.0
Professionals	7.9
Associate Professionals (Nursing) and technical	41.1
Enrolled Nurses	9.4
Clerical and Related	21.8
Ancillary (Catering, Cleaning, Laundry)	4.5
Support Services (Auxiliary, CSSD Care Assistants)	14.4
Total	100.0

Table 4.4 above shows the occupational distribution of the sample and demonstrates very clearly the over-representation (compared to the workforce as a whole) of associate professional occupations which, if enrolled nurses are included, make up more than half of those surveyed. This is in contrast to the overall occupational distribution of women in Northern Ireland, in which 11.9% are employed as "associate professionals" (WWLS, 1993). This over-representation is clearly attributable to the dominance of the "caring" and "therapy" professions including, nurses, physiotherapists, radiographers, occupational and speech therapists etc, in a sample drawn exclusively from the healthcare sector of the labour market. The corollary of this is an under-representation of women in "manual" occupations and in the low paid occupations of sales, cleaning and catering, which together make up more than one-third of all employment for women in Northern Ireland. Less than 20% of the sample, only thirty-eight women, were engaged in the ancillary (catering, cleaning and laundry) and support services grades, such as ward orderlies, CSSD (Central Sterile Supply Department), and care assistants, which might equate to such low paid groups in the labour force as a whole. This under-representation

of ancillary workers, in particular, is due to the fact that, as discussed in Chapter 3, most of these services had recently been privatised under a regime of Compulsory Competitive Tendering. Whilst hundreds of women still worked in the hospitals and some community services as cleaners, catering assistants, cooks etc they were no longer health service employees, and hence did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the sample.

The representation of professionals and of clerical and related occupations in the sample broadly equates to that in the female workforce as a whole as described in the WWLS. The 8.8% of women described as professionals in the WWLS is more likely to reflect, however, the large numbers of women in the teaching profession in Northern Ireland, whilst the professions represented in this study were medical, medical related and social work. Managerial and administrative occupations are somewhat under-represented in the sample, at one per cent, compared to 8.1% of the female workforce as a whole. This is in one respect surprising, given the very large numbers of women working in health services in Northern Ireland, and a "bottom-heavy" administrative structure in which women form most of the large base of clerical and junior administrative grades (Davies and Rosser, 1986). In another it is less so, given the tendency, in the post Griffiths NHS in particular, for general management positions to be occupied by men and for women to be under-represented in senior grades with management responsibilities, even in the overwhelmingly female professions of nursing and midwifery where, although 90% of the workers are women, women hold only 63% of management posts. (IHSM Report for NHS Woman's Unit: 1995)

Length of Service

The great majority of women in the sample (76.7%) had worked in the health service for more than five years and of these 38% had worked for more than ten years.

Table 4.5 - Length of Service	
<i>Length</i>	<i>%</i>
< 2 years	7.4
2 - 5 years	15.8
5 - 10 years	38.6
> 10 years	38.1
Total	100.0

This long service, and apparently strong career attachment pattern, can be explained in part by the nature of many health care occupations, such as nursing or medicine, in which those training are "employed" by the health service throughout quite lengthy training periods and "length of service" reflects training, as well as employment with qualified or post-registration status. The pattern also undoubtedly stems in part from the monopoly position which the NHS has held over employment in most of the specialist health care professions, at least until the developments in private health care over the past decade or so. Even today, however, the private sector employs only a minority of all healthcare workers. A further explanation of long-service, especially applicable to the "non health-care specific" occupations such as clerical and ancillary work, may well lie in the lack of alternative "secure" employment in Northern Ireland. The majority of those fortunate enough to obtain permanent superannuable employment, under reasonable terms and conditions of service, may well be reluctant to relinquish it in a labour market of consistently high unemployment levels, and in an area where the alternatives for

unskilled employment are largely process work for, often short stay, multinational companies, or work such as food-processing in a less attractive environment. Taken together, such explanations for the length of service patterns of women in the sample are quite plausible. Overall, however, the norm of long service in this sample is somewhat at odds with the picture presented nationally of, nurses in particular, leaving the NHS dissatisfied with pay and conditions.

Education

The women in this sample had, on the whole, higher levels of educational qualifications than women in general in Northern Ireland.

Table 4.6 - Educational Qualifications	
<i>Qualification</i>	<i>%</i>
University Degree	22.8
GCSE	40.1
GCE 'A' Level	19.8
Commercial Business etc.	7.9
None	9.4
Total	100.0

Nearly a quarter of the sample shown in Table 4.6 had a University degree or equivalent; more than two-thirds had other educational qualifications including GCSEs, GCE 'A' levels and various vocational and business related qualifications. Less than 10% of the sample had no educational qualifications whatsoever.

This is in striking contrast to the more representative sample used by the WWLS (Curry, 1993). Nearly half of the women in that sample (46%) had no educational qualifications and just under 10% had a degree or professional qualification. Two factors are particularly significant in explaining the disparities between these two samples of women in Northern Ireland. Firstly, the age distribution of the samples is significant. The sample used in the present study was of women who had recently become mothers. It therefore, by definition, did not include older women. The oldest respondent was in fact aged forty-one, and as observed above, the vast majority, more than 85%, were in the 26-35 age group. This is the age group which begins to show most clearly the benefits of women's increasing participation in further and higher education. By the 1980s fewer girls (19%) than boys (29%) in Northern Ireland were leaving school unqualified (Johnston and Rooney, 1987). In terms of higher achievers, 12% of girls gained two or more 'A' levels, compared to 9% of boys, and in 1988/89, 49% of full-time University undergraduates in Northern Ireland were women. The WWLS was based on a representative sample of women of working age which, again by definition, included women up to retirement age. In so doing it demonstrates clearly the disadvantaged position of older women in the Northern Ireland labour market in terms of educational qualifications. Over half of those who left school with no qualifications are, according to the WWLS, in the 41-60 age category, and in that respect very different to the women in the present study. The WWLS also found that over three-quarters of the best qualified women, those with 'A' levels, were younger women in the 21-40 age band (Curry 1993).

The age distribution of the samples is then a factor of some significance in explaining their disparity in terms of educational attainment, but it is not the sole explanation. Significant too is the occupational distribution of the samples. The WWLS sample was

representative of all women of working age, regardless of whether they were currently in paid employment, and regardless of occupational level for those who were. The present study, on the other hand, is concerned only with women in employment in one specific sector of the labour market. It cannot be claimed that the majority of women working throughout the NHS will be better qualified than women in general. It seems likely that many of the ancillary and general workers in catering, cleaning and laundry services, 74% of whom are women, will have few, if any, educational qualifications. In this particular sample however, for reasons outlined above, ancillary grades are under-represented, and as a corollary, associate professionals, nursing and technical staff in particular, are over-represented. Occupations such as nursing will have had, as a basic entry qualification, high grades at GCSE. In practice most of those entering nurse training in the past decade will have had 'A' level qualifications. Many in the profession, especially in Northern Ireland which has been part of a pilot project, now have University degrees taken either as part of their training as Project 2000 nurses or as part of on-going in-service training. Similarly the so-called "P&T" occupations (professional and technical grades) and professions allied to medicine, such as radiography and physiotherapy, increasingly have 'A' level requirements for entry to training, which for many involves taking a degree level course.

Given the occupational distribution of the sample in the present study then it is unsurprising that the majority of respondents had educational qualifications, many at quite an advanced level. The minority (9.4%) with no qualifications were almost all to be found in the ancillary and support services categories which were, in any case, under-represented in the sample. Interestingly, the educational level of the sample in the present study is broadly equivalent to that of the sample achieved by Brannen and Moss

(1991) in their study of dual earner households after maternity leave. Women in that sample, which also over-represented managerial and professional occupations, had generally (66%) qualifications at GCE 'A' level or above.

Earnings

Table 4.7 shows the earnings levels of the sample in the present study.

Table 4.7 - Earnings Levels	
<i>Earnings per week (net)</i>	<i>%</i>
£75 - £100	0.5
£101 - £150	23.2
£151 - £200	40.2
£201 - £250	22.3
£251 - £350	10.9
£350+	3.0
Total	100.0

As might be expected, given the over-representation of associate professional occupations and the under-representation of ancillary and support services in the occupational distribution of the sample, the pattern of earnings is somewhat skewed towards higher earners compared to the pattern in more representative samples. The WWLS, for example found that more than half (56%) of women in employment in Northern Ireland were earning less than £100 per week (net). By contrast, only one person in the present study was earning between £75 and £100 per week. The largest single group were those earning between £151-£200 per week (net). This again reflects the predominance in the sample of basic grade registered nurses, the majority of whom would be paid on a salary

scale currently ranging from £11,659-£13,338 per annum (January 1995 salaries)¹. That fact is in itself perhaps evidence of the degree of vertical segregation present within many occupations, including health service occupations (Hakim, 1978; Davies and Rosser, 1986). Although horizontal segregation has declined gradually during the twentieth century, and within occupations men and women now work together, they often work at different grades. In nursing, for example, women remain at, and provide the bulk of, the basic grades, whilst men are disproportionately represented at the higher paid nursing officer and nurse manager grades. At the other extreme a significant proportion (13.9%) of the sample used in the present study was in what might be regarded as a higher earnings category of over £250 per week (net) compared to just 4.3% with such earnings in the WWLS (Montgomery 1993). This is not to suggest that employees of the NHS enjoy higher than average earnings, but rather it again reflects the occupational distribution of this particular sample. The disparity in earnings between this and the WWLS sample, most dramatic in terms of the numbers of low-earners, also reflects the fact that the sample in the present study had almost all worked full-time prior to taking maternity leave and their earnings reflect that full-time status. By way of contrast, 39% of the women in the WWLS sample were part-time workers, of whom the large majority, 71%, were working less than 21 hours per week and 10% were working fewer than 8 hours per week. The pay of part-time workers reflects not only the hours worked though, but also what is often the status of their employment, as "peripheral" workers in the lowest paid sectors of the economy. Sixty-six percent of part-time female employees in Northern Ireland work in catering, cleaning, hairdressing and other personal services (EOC (NI), 1995). Very few part-time workers earn more than £150 per week (net) and the average gross part-time earnings are £85-90 per week (Northern Ireland

¹ During the course of the study there was just one salary review which resulted in average increases of around 5% for nurses.

Abstract of Statistics, 1994). The differing employment status of women in the two samples clearly goes some way towards explaining differences in earnings also.

Summary

The characteristics of the sample achieved for this study of employment decisions following maternity leave have been discussed and, in so far as was possible, compared to the characteristics of other more representative samples in terms of age, marital status, occupation, education and earnings. Comparison of the samples reveals similarities as well as differences; the most striking difference being the under-representation in this sample of women at lower occupational levels, a feature which is also reflected in both the educational qualifications and the earnings of the sample, 61% of whom earned as much as or more than their partners. This was thus a privileged group when compared to women in general and such variances from the "national" picture must be borne in mind in interpreting the findings from this study. Statistical generalisations are not made from these data, however, and it is important to note that the characteristics of the sample are those of the dominant occupational groups in which women are currently employed in the health services in Northern Ireland.

CHAPTER 5

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION - FINDINGS

The dominant ideology of parenthood in this country is such that, on becoming a mother the majority of women must make a decision as to whether they should leave employment interrupting their working lives to raise children, or continue in employment throughout the childbearing years, returning to work after a period of maternity leave for the birth of each child.

Having acknowledged that such decision-making is a complex process the aims of this study were to explore that complexity and to gain an understanding of why one decision or another is made. It has sought to do so firstly from the perspective of the decision-maker, for her choices and decisions will be shaped by the meanings which she gives to her situation and by her overall interpretation of the world. But such decisions also need to be set in the context of the events and the ideological and structural forces which constrain individuals as they construct their lives and define their situation. The study therefore seeks also to explore the opportunities and constraints, both structural and ideological, upon women for combining motherhood and employment.

In pursuit of these aims the study has been structured around a series of propositions suggesting a probabilistic relationship between a number of variables and the likelihood of a woman returning to work following maternity leave. Chapter 3 described how that

relationship was explored through interviews using a, largely structured, questionnaire, based on factors suggested by previous studies in this area. They included factors which might be described as "Economic or Financial" which were:

- partner's employment and earnings;
- the individual's own employment, education and earnings.

Secondly there were "Ideological or Attitudinal" factors:

- the "meaning" which employment holds for the individual;
- the attitude of her partner to motherhood and employment and to her specific employment.

A third "group" of factors were those relating to "Household Relationships":

- household financial management;
- the degree to which domestic and caring responsibilities are shared within the household;

And finally there were the so-called "Structural" factors, relating to the opportunities and constraints upon the woman for combining motherhood and employment. These were:

- availability of "family friendly" employment practices;
- availability of childcare.

The questionnaire used in interviews was designed to explore each of these areas.

Clearly there are, however, a number of areas in which the variables suggested, and the "groups" into which they fall, may combine and overlap. Household financial management, for example, is an economic variable as well as part of the "relationships" group. It is also, perhaps less obviously, intermingled with "ideologies and attitudes" about sharing within partnerships, about roles within relationships and about how households "should" be managed. Similarly household relationships and the degree of support and sharing in domestic work and childcare are almost certainly governed by particular attitudes, ideologies and beliefs regarding gender roles and responsibilities within relationships. But they will also be mediated by economic and social factors such as the relative earnings potential and occupational status of the partners in the relationship.

Whilst it is possible then, and useful, to explore the significance of individual variables for the decision made, and to examine the strength of the relationship between individual variables and the likelihood of a woman returning to work, and indeed that will be the approach adopted in this chapter, such analysis is not sufficient in itself to explore the complexity of the issues involved. If, as stated in the Introduction (p.11), an analysis is required which is indeed "a dialectical process moving from individuals to their location within households and partnerships and between the ways in which actors construct their own beliefs and actions to the ways in which significant others and wider social forces act upon them", then it must go further than exploring the significance of individual factors if it is to avoid the limitations of earlier work in this area. The analysis described in Chapter 6 will explore the ways in which the variables which are significant for the

decision interrelate and combine to produce the combination of variables whose presence will most accurately predict the likelihood of a woman returning to employment following maternity leave.

Before that more complex analysis may be carried out however it is necessary to consider the strength of the relationship between individual variables, or groups of related variables, and the likelihood of a woman making the decision to return to employment following maternity leave.

It is perhaps useful to open this discussion of the findings of the study by a consideration of the employment decisions actually made by the sample.

Returners and Non-Returners

Table 5.1 shows that more than 72% of the sample indicated an intention to return to work following maternity leave.

Table 5.1 - Sample by Employment Decision	
<i>Decision</i>	<i>%</i>
Return	72.3
Non-Return	27.7
Total	100.0
N	202

This is a much higher proportion of returners than might have been anticipated from for example, the PSI study (McRae, 1991) which has been compared to the sample in this study (Chapter 4). Of that sample 45% of mothers were in paid employment eight or nine months after childbirth. Although the PSI study did find that women who had worked in the public sector prior to maternity leave were substantially more likely to return than women in other sectors of employment, with 60% returning, even compared to that the present sample do appear more intent on return than those previously surveyed. Similarly, women in this sample were much more likely to intend to return to full-time rather than part-time employment.

Table 5.2 - Status of Return	
<i>Status</i>	<i>%</i>
Full-time	76.0
Part-time	18.5
Job Share	-
Don't Know	5.5

Table 5.2 shows that 76% of those planning to return said they would be going back to full-time work. This compares to 33% in the PSI sample. It should be noted too, given the usual definition of part-time as less than 30 hours, that a number of these "part-time" returners did indicate that they would only be working "reduced hours" which could mean as many as 28 or 30 per week.

The contrast between the samples is striking in these respects and the characteristics of those in the present study are, at first sight, much at odds with the national picture. It is important to note however other differing aspects of the studies which provide some of the explanations. Probably the most significant difference lies in the fact that the PSI

sample was representative of all mothers nationally. It was not confined to any specific sector of the labour market nor to any particular occupational grouping. The present study confines its attention to the public sector and, based on the findings of earlier work, it is recognised that rates of return are therefore likely to be higher than in the workforce in general. Secondly, the PSI sample represented all mothers, regardless of birth order or of the number of children they had. The achieved sample in fact divided almost evenly between women who had had their first child and those who had had a second or subsequent child (McRae, 1991 p.9). The present study, in contrast, is a study of first-time mothers. Such women are more likely both to have been in full-time employment prior to maternity leave and to return to full-time employment. Twenty-nine percent of mothers included in the PSI study had been working on a part-time basis before going on maternity leave. The majority of these women are likely to have had other children and to have made part-time working arrangements on returning to the workforce following a previous period of maternity leave or an earlier break in employment (Harrop and Moss, 1995). The PSI study did find that 49% of those who had been in full-time employment were going back to work on a full-time basis. Even this however is a much smaller proportion of returners than is evidenced by the current study. In this context it may be significant to note that only 22.3% of the sample in the current study felt that they would be permitted to work part-time at their grade or level in their present occupation. It may be that the majority felt that there was no real choice regarding the status of their return to work. Twenty-eight percent did say that job-sharing would be permitted, although, somewhat disturbingly, 26.7% said that they didn't know if job-sharing was available - this despite the declared policy of the employer that job-sharing would be permitted wherever practical and feasible. A number of women did in fact comment that part-time work was being "phased out" as their employers were concerned

about continuity of care and about cost-effectiveness, both said to be inhibited by the formerly high incidence of part-time employment.

A further factor to be borne in mind in comparing the samples is that the PSI study looked at the actual employment status of mothers eight or nine months after childbirth. The present study is concerned with what women "intend" to do.

There is no evidence to suggest that the women in this study would not fulfil their intentions - on the contrary most were going back to work within a few weeks and had already put in place arrangements for their return including getting babies "used to" their future childminders and ensuring transport was available. Nonetheless, this was not a longitudinal study and it is not possible to say with certainty that all 72.3% of the sample did go back to work, nor is it possible to say with certainty that they all remained in employment beyond the three months necessary to avoid repayment of Contractual Maternity Pay. On the latter point it is however worth noting McRae's findings that almost three-quarters of the women in her sample who had received Contractual Maternity Pay were in employment eight or nine months following the birth of their child - a finding which suggests that in the majority of cases intentions are translated into actions.

In considering the rather different employment decisions made by the women in this study compared to, for example, those in the PSI study, it is also worth noting when the studies were each undertaken.

The PSI sample was made up of women who had given birth in December 1987 or

January 1988. The present study was carried out amongst women who had babies in the period June 1993 to August 1995. All the available evidence points to an acceleration over more than a decade of a trend, noted as long ago as 1984 (Martin and Roberts, 1984), towards an increase in the proportion of mothers, and in particular mothers of young children, participating in paid work and towards a return to work between births. That accelerating trend is noted in comparisons of the two PSI studies (Daniel, 1980 and McRae, 1991). It is highlighted even more convincingly in recent work from Harrop and Moss (1995) which shows that whilst the odds of being employed increased over the 1980s for all groups of mothers, the most striking change was among mothers with children under five years. Their odds of being employed increased by some 129% in the period 1981 to 1989 compared to a 52% increase for mothers with a youngest child at primary school. Harrop and Moss have noted too that the difference was most marked for full-time employment, where the odds for mothers with a youngest child under five increased by 140% compared to 30% for mothers with a youngest child of primary age.

Given this accelerating trend, most notable from 1986 onwards, it seems entirely possible that, in the five or so years between the PSI survey in 1988 and the current study in the mid 1990s, more mothers have been returning to work. The trend may well have accelerated to the extent that a return to full-time work, in particular following the birth of a first child, is now the norm and those who do not return may now be considered exceptional, and themselves worthy of the kind of study formerly focussed upon "deviant" women returners.

Whilst the "non-returners" in the sample are not to be the specific focus for the present study, a note regarding their behaviour is perhaps useful at this point in the context of

the somewhat unique characteristics of many healthcare occupations. As observed above the health service remains practically a monopoly employer in this country for groups such as doctors, nurses, radiographers and speech therapists. Despite a burgeoning private health care sector, less prevalent it must be said in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK, the vast majority of such professionals can find employment only within the NHS. Hence labour "turnover" or "wastage" amongst such groups has rather different characteristics to those of turnover amongst the labour force in general. The majority of those leaving health service employment following the birth of a child do so in the knowledge that they will return sooner or later. Most who have acquired "industry specific" skills and training recognise that if they are to make use of these in the future it will be through a return to work in the NHS.

Figure I below shows the future employment intentions of those not returning to work following maternity leave. Most anticipate a return to work at some time in the future and of these a substantial majority contemplate a return to the NHS. The occupations of the non-returner group as a whole are however significant in this respect. As Table 5.6 (p.160) shows three major groupings amongst non-returners are, ancillary grades, the majority of whom are laundry workers; support services, largely orderlies and auxiliaries; and clerical grades, respectively making up 11.0%, 27.0% and 38.0% of non-returners. Few of these could be regarded as "industry specific" occupations in that any skills and training they may have acquired could be used more widely than in health care work, hence they are the least likely to anticipate a return to work in the NHS, as is illustrated in Figure 2 and 3, which contrast the intentions of those in non-health-care specific occupations with those in more specific groups.

Figure I: Likelihood of Return to Work in NHS

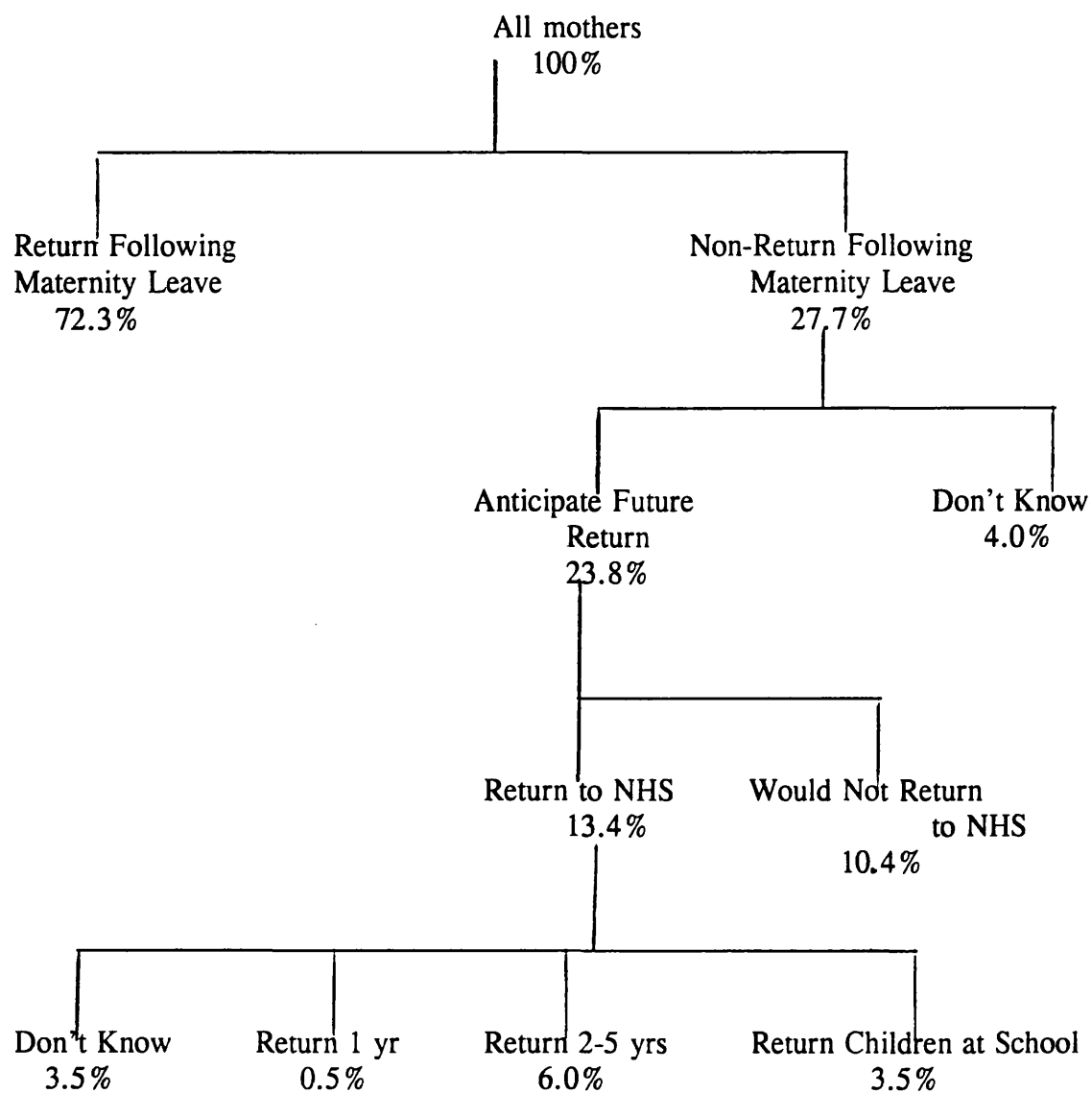
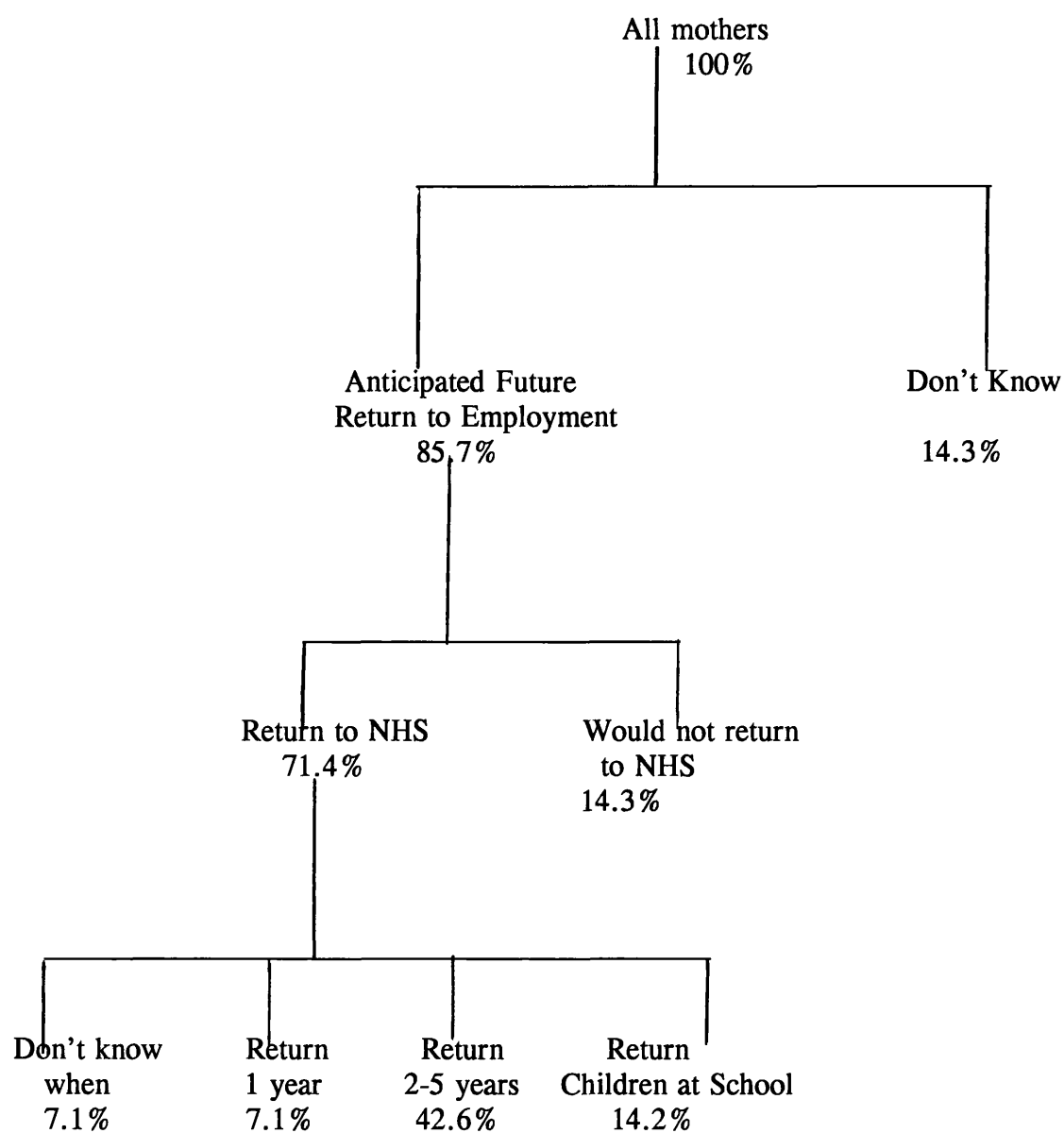


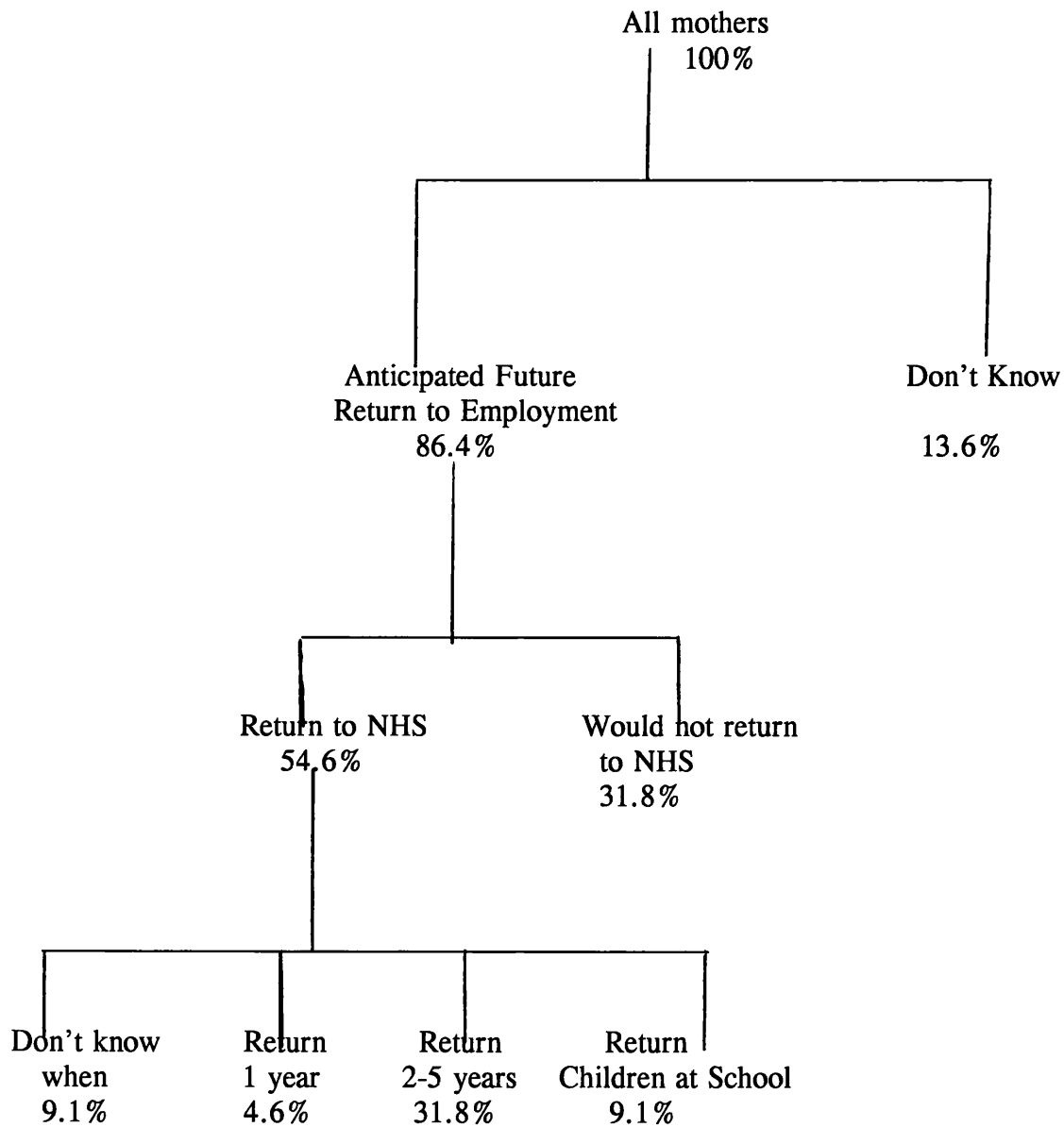
Figure 2: Non Returners in Health-Care Specific Occupations (n=14)

Likelihood of return to Work in NHS



**Figure 3: Non Returners in Non Health-Care Specific Occupations,
Clerical, Ancillary, Support (n=42)**

Likelihood of return to Work in NHS



The majority of non-returners in fact anticipated a return to health service employment within two to five years or when all their children were at school. It would seem then that although some health service employees will have discontinuous employment histories, even they cannot be regarded as "lost" or "wastage" to the service in the longer term.

The above provides an overview of the "type" of employment decision made by the women in this sample following their maternity leave. It is now necessary to turn to a consideration of the factors which may have influenced such decision making and the strength of the relationship between these factors and the decision made.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL FACTORS

In any casual discussion of why women, and in particular women who are mothers, work, financial "reasons" are likely to be given prominence as the major deciding factor. Traditionally the view was that a mother would go back to work "for the money" if she "had to". That is, if her partner's job was insecure; or perhaps if her own earnings potential was so great that it could materially alter the family's circumstances.

Such casual inferences are supported, in part at least, by a number of the studies reviewed in Chapter I (eg. Layard (1978), Yeandle (1984), Moss (1988)).

On the other hand the received wisdom has been that a woman would be unlikely to "rush" back to work after the birth of a child if her partner was in a secure job with an adequate income and could thus "afford to keep her". Yeandle (1984) for example, in

support of this tells us that in her study those who refrained from employment until they had completed their families were "(mostly) married to men in white collar occupations with relatively high earnings" (p.63)

As an explanation of why mothers do or do not continue in employment "financial reasons" such as those above, are perhaps to be expected, but they can be deceptively simple. "At one level they are what everyone knows about. They are both matters of which everyone has their own unique experience and about which there are some shared understandings" (Brannen (1987) p.11) To say that one is going back "for the money" has been regarded as a socially acceptable response, perhaps forestalling any further questions. An obvious starting point for the present study has therefore been to consider whether women who intended to return to work following maternity leave differed from those not intending to do so, in terms of their partners' employment and income. The proposition was constructed that *"women with partners in low-earning and/or insecure occupations will be more likely to continue in employment than women with partners in high-earning and/or secure occupations"*.

Partner's Employment and Earnings

In considering the viability of this proposition, at the outset two points are worthy of note. Firstly, a general point that, in any studies that there have been of dual-earner households, far less attention has been paid to paternal employment than to maternal employment. The dominant ideology of parenthood views paternal employment as a given feature of family life, unlike maternal employment which is viewed as somewhat deviant and likely to be problematic. Within what discourse there is, the main problem

with respect to fathers and employment is seen as relating to men who are unable to earn a "breadwinning" wage, either because of unemployment or low pay. There are very few studies of paternal employment and there is little information on actual patterns of employment, beyond average times spent in paid work per day. Secondly, and more specifically, since fathers were not formally interviewed as part of this study, information on partners' employment and earnings relies almost entirely on the quantitative data and qualitative comments derived from the interviews with mothers. This will therefore reflect their perceptions of their partner's employment and the meaning which it holds for them. It may also be inaccurate in some cases. Previous studies (Pahl, 1987; Morris, 1990) suggest that women do not always know the detail of partners' earnings in particular, but will usually make "guesstimates" to disguise what is seen as a contradiction to the "sharing" ethos within marriage.

In order to test the strength of the relationship between partner's employment and earnings and the likelihood of her return to work the women in the sample were asked questions relating to their partner's occupation, length of time in employment, periods of unemployment and his earnings.

The 200 women in the sample who were living with a partner at the time of interview had, as noted in Chapter 4, fewer unemployed partners than would be the case for women in general in Northern Ireland. During the period in which interviews took place male unemployment was generally between 11.5% and 13%. Only 6.4% of the sample, some thirteen women, had a partner who was currently unemployed and only 16.5% had a partner who had been unemployed in the past five years.

Table 5.3 - Partner's Employment Status by Employment Decision		
<i>Status</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Employed	70.6	29.4
Unemployed	100.0	-
No Partner	50.0	50.0
n	146	56 *

Chi-square DF Level of Significance
5.74788 2 0.10

* n applies for Returners and Non-Returners in each table referring to Return and Non-Return

Table 5.3 above shows that all those whose partner was currently unemployed intended to return to work following maternity leave, thereby supporting the proposition that those whose partners employment was "insecure" would be more likely to return. The numbers involved are small but the chi-square test carried out on the data revealed that the relationship was statistically significant, albeit only at the 0.10% level. This behaviour differs from that of wives of unemployed men who are, in general, less likely to be employed than other women, (Daniel 1974, Morris 1990) largely it is assumed because of the "benefits trap" when income support is adjusted to take account of wives' earnings.

Even at this early point in the analysis it seems likely that a variable such as "partners employment" cannot be regarded as a stand alone factor in the influence which it exerts. The majority (54.0%) of the returners who had unemployed partners were earning more than £250 (net) per week and may well have calculated (although only one commented to that effect) that their earnings would be sufficient to make a return to employment worthwhile in terms of the overall household income. This was especially so since only two partners were "long-term" unemployed and hence relying upon means-tested income

support as opposed to unemployment benefit. Hence a doubt is immediately aroused as to whether it is the fact of having an unemployed partner which has influenced the women's employment decisions or the fact that, the majority, had themselves the potential for quite high earnings. A further mediating influence may have been the role which unemployed partners were seen to play in meeting childcare needs. Although it was recognised as probably a short-term measure, unemployed men were expected to provide most of the necessary childcare when their partner returned to work. Present employment status is only one indicator of "security" however; a further indicator of job security or employment stability may be the number of jobs which partners had had over recent years. Chi-square tests on the data showed a statistically significant positive relationship between the number of jobs her partner had had over a five year period and the likelihood of a woman returning to employment following maternity leave. Hence it seems that even the majority of women whose partners were currently in employment were likely to be influenced by his employment history in the recent past. Interestingly too, non-returners indicated that insecurity in their partners employment would have been likely to reverse their decision to leave work. Fifty-seven percent of non-returners said that in such circumstances they would have continued in employment. Although caution is necessary in generalising from such findings - the women in this sample were for example, higher earners on the whole than women in general in Northern Ireland and it may have been more worthwhile for them than for most to continue in employment - nonetheless, in this sample, a relationship did exist between having an unemployed partner and the likelihood of a woman returning to work. The direction of the relationship though differed from that which generally exists between male unemployment and women's labour market participation.

The largest single occupational category for partners' employment was the craft and related category which described 21.0% of the sample. This was followed in importance by professionals and associate professionals, a number of whom, in common with their wives, were employed in health and social services, and the majority of whom would be regarded, in Northern Ireland terms as being in "secure" employment in that they worked in the public sector.

Table 5.4 below shows the occupational distribution of fathers in relation to mothers in the sample. In Chapter 4 it was observed that there were more women at higher occupational levels in this sample than in the general population; this perhaps explains the fact that so many women in the sample had either similar or higher occupational status compared to their partners.

Table 5.4 - Partners' Occupation by Occupational Distribution								
<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Partner's Occupation %</i>							
	Mgr's/ Admin	Prof.	Assoc. Prof	Cler'l/ Related	Craft/ Related	Pers'al Srvices	Sales	Plant/ Machine op
Managers & Admin	-	50.0	-	50.0	-	-	-	-
Professionals	25.0	68.8	-	-	-	-	6.3	-
Asoc Prof & Nrs'g	10.4	23.4	20.8	9.1	18.2	9.1	2.6	6.5
Clerical & Related	12.5	7.5	22.5	20.0	25.0	5.0	5.0	2.5
Ancillary	-	-	11.1	-	22.2	11.1	11.1	44.4
Support Services	-	-	4.0	-	32.0	4.0	12.0	48.0

The study found that non-returners were somewhat more likely than returners to have partners in the plant and machine operatives category, 17.9% compared to 11.0% of returners. Just over 7.0% of non-returners were married to men in professional occupations compared to 22.2% of returners with partners in that category. As there is

generally a relationship between occupational status and earnings what then can be said of the findings which will support the proposition that women with partners in low-earning occupations will be more likely to continue in employment than those with high-earning partners? Overall, in the sample 53.5% of women had partners in the "lower" earnings category with a take-home pay of less than £250 per week.

Table 5.5 - Partner's Earnings by Employment Decision		
<i>Earnings</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Low	69.4	30.6
High	74.4	25.6
Don't Know	83.3	16.7

Note: Low Earnings < £250 per week
High Earnings > £250 per week

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>D F</u>	<u>Level of Significance</u>
1.34731	2	> 0.20

As table 5.5 shows, 5.0% more of those with high earning, than those with low-earning partners intended to return to work. There is little support then for the proposition that women with low-earning partners will be more likely than others to return to work following maternity leave. The chi-square test revealed that the difference is not statistically significant however and overall it can only be concluded that the strength of the relationship between partner's employment, earnings and the likelihood of a woman's return to work is not in itself sufficient to enable an accurate prediction to be made of whether a particular woman will or will not return.

Woman's Employment and Earnings Potential

The theories of mother's employment considered in Chapter I also suggested however that financial factors of a rather different type might be in operation influencing women's employment decisions following maternity leave. It was observed that Erickson et al (1979), Dex and Walters (1992), Waldfogel (1993) as well as the PSI study of Maternity Rights in Britain (McRae 1991) and the more recent work of Harrop and Moss (1995) all suggest that women with high earnings potential, often associated with occupational level and qualifications, especially those with a considerable length of service with a single employer, are more likely to continue in employment following maternity leave than those with low earnings potential in less long-term employment.

In order to establish the strength of the relationship between occupational level and earnings potential and the likelihood of a return to employment, and to establish the relationship, if any, between educational qualifications, length of service, and these variables, women were asked a series of questions relating to education, employment history and earnings.

The women in this study were engaged in a range of occupations of varying "status". Table 4.2 above showed the occupational distribution of the sample, and, as observed in Chapter 4 there is an higher proportion of associate professionals compared to the population as a whole, reflecting the dominance of the nursing and therapy professions within health services. There is also an under representation of ancillary occupations reflecting the privatisation of work such as cleaning and catering throughout the health services.

Table 5.6 - Occupational Classes by Employment Decision		
<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Managers & Administrators	100.0	-
Professionals	87.5	12.5
Associate Professionals (Nursing) and Technical	89.2	10.8
Enrolled Nurses	89.4	10.6
Clerical and Related	52.2	47.9
Ancillary (Catering, Cleaning, Laundry)	22.2	77.8
Support Services (Auxiliary, CSSD Care Assistants)	48.3	51.7

<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>D F</u>	<u>Level of Significance</u>
22.89648	6	0.001

Table 5.6 above shows the occupational distribution by employment decision and suggests the probability of a relationship between occupational level and the likelihood of a return to work following maternity leave. It is clear that those in the "lower" occupational categories were much less likely to intend to return than those in the "higher" level occupations. Nearly 90.0% of the largest occupational group, nurses and the professions allied to medicine, such as radiography and physiotherapy, intended to return; a similar percentage of professionals, ie doctors, pharmacists, psychologists and social workers intended to return, as did all the managers in the sample. In contrast to this just over 22.0% of ancillary grades, mainly in laundry and related occupations, were going back; less than half of the support services staff, ie. nursing assistants, auxiliaries, care attendants and CSSD workers, and just over half of the large group of clerical and related occupations intended to return. The differences in this case were statistically significant at the .001% level. These findings suggest that occupational level is a factor of some significance in determining the probability of a woman returning to work after maternity

leave, and that those at the upper end of the occupational spectrum are significantly more likely to return than those lower down the scale. The relationship found between occupation/socio-economic group and employment is consistent with the findings of other studies. For example, Thomas et al's (1994) analysis of the General Household Survey 1992, suggests that employment is highest amongst women with children in the highest status occupations (professionals or managers), drops for women in intermediate and junior non-manual and skilled manual occupations, before falling to the lowest level for women in the semi-skilled and personal service groups. Caution is necessary however in interpreting even these findings. The nature of the woman's occupation, as well as the level it is at, may influence the likelihood of a return to employment following childbirth (especially the same employment). The largest groups of women returners in this sample were those engaged in occupations such as medicine, nursing and professions allied to medicine, for which the NHS is virtually a monopoly employer. As observed above, even those not returning immediately to such occupations did, in the main, intend to return to the health service at some stage. A failure to do so would be to waste the "industry specific" skills acquired over long and often arduous periods of training. Women in such industry-specific occupations would, it seems reasonable to assume, be more likely to return to work since they may be less likely than those with more "generalisable" skills, such as perhaps clerical and secretarial occupations, to feel that they could take some time out after childbirth and still be confident of getting work which would use and reward their skills, elsewhere in the economy at a later stage.

In claiming occupation, or occupational level as a major determinant in the likelihood of return to work, it must also be borne in mind that occupation, as well as being an indicator of continuity in employment, is often related to other factors which may be

themselves, either individually or collectively, indicative of the likelihood of return. Occupational level may be related for example, to level of education or qualifications, it may reflect length of time spent in the labour market, or in that specific employment, and it may be related to earnings levels. All of which may be singly or in combination, related to the probability of a return to employment following maternity leave.

Occupational level may reflect, as observed above, educational level. The strength of the relationship between educational attainment and the likelihood of a return to employment was also tested in that context.

Table 5.7 - Educational Level by Employment Decision		
<i>Education</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-return %</i>
University Degree	87.0	13.0
Sub-degree education	72.3	27.7
No qualification	36.8	63.2

Chi-Square
22.89648

D F
6

Level of Significance
0.001

Table 5.7 gives Educational Level by Employment Decision and shows the clear and statistically significant relationship revealed by the chi-square test. Those educated to degree level in particular were significantly more likely to intend to return to work (87.0%) than women with no educational qualifications. (36.8%)

If the intervening variable of occupational level is considered we find that almost all (45 out of 46) of those with degrees were employed in the "high-returner" groups of

professionals, associate professionals and managers, while all of those with no qualifications were employed in the "low-returner" groups of ancillary and support workers.

Table 5.8 - Education by Occupation			
<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Sub-Degree</i>	<i>No Qualification</i>
Managers & Admin	100.0	-	-
Professionals	93.8	6.3	-
Assoc Professionals	31.3	68.6	-
Clerical & Related	4.5	95.4	-
Ancillary	-	44.4	55.6
Support Services	-	51.7	48.3

The relationship between occupational level, education and the likelihood of a return to work following childbirth serves to confirm the findings of other studies such as that of Glover and Arber (1995) which found that the age of youngest child had the least pronounced effect in professional classes and the most pronounced amongst manual workers. It supports also the findings of Harrop and Moss's (1995) analysis of the Labour Force Survey, 1989, which indicate that 63 % of graduate mothers with a preschool child were in employment compared to 26% of mothers with no qualifications. (p.432). Their analysis also suggests that graduate employed mothers are twice as likely to be employed full-time compared to those with no qualifications.

It would seem then that education and occupational level are related and that both separately and in combination these factors are positively related to the likelihood of a return to employment following maternity leave. Once again however caution is necessary in any attempt to generalise from these findings. As observed in Chapter 4 women in this sample were both employed at higher levels, in particular in associate

professional occupations, and were more likely to have educational qualifications than are women in general in Northern Ireland. The latter because of the educational entry requirements of many health service occupations.

Previous studies (Brannen and Moss (1991), McRae (1991)) have suggested that a further factor influencing the likelihood of mothers returning to work after maternity leave is the length of time spent in paid employment prior to the birth. The strength of this relationship was tested in the present study as it seemed likely that not only would a straightforward relationship exist but also that length of service would have an effect upon other variables such as occupational level and earnings potential.

One outstanding characteristic of the sample as a whole was the proportion of women who had worked in the health service for a long time. For reasons discussed in some detail in Chapter 4, more than three-quarters of the sample had worked in the health service for more than five years and of these 38.1% had more than ten years service. Table 5.9 below shows that those with long service were significantly more likely to return after maternity leave than were newer recruits to the health service.

Table 5.9 - Length of NHS Service by Employment Decision		
<i>Length of Service</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Less than 26 weeks	-	-
26 weeks but less than 1 year	-	100
1 year but less than 2	30.8	69.2
2 years but less than 5	65.6	34.4
5 years but less than 10	74.4	25.6
More than 10 years	81.8	18.2

Chi-Square
20.76595

D F
4

Level of Significance
0.001

More than 80.0% of those employed for more than ten years intended to return compared to just over 30.0% of those with less than two years service. It might be assumed at an intuitive level that those who had "invested" so much of their working lives in a specific area of employment would be more reluctant to waste that investment by withdrawing entirely from the labour force. A counter argument might be however that those who had worked for longer had had greater opportunities to accumulate financial reserves and so could better afford to take a "career break". Length of service on its own, despite the statistical significance of the relationship at the .001 % significance level cannot be seen as the sole determining factor in whether a woman will return to work. A further hypothesis however might be that those who have worked for longer periods are likely to be those who have also attained higher occupational levels - either through lengthy training required for higher level occupations and/or through having worked their way up the occupational ladder. If this is indeed the case then they are also more likely to be those with a greater earnings potential, for one or other of those reasons.

Table 5.10 below shows the relationship between length of service and occupational level. It seems clear that a relationship does exist between these variables, in particular in the case of professionals, who were most likely to have long service.

Table 5.10 - Length of Service by Occupation					
<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Length of NHS Service</i>				
	<i>< 1 year</i>	<i>1-2 years</i>	<i>2-5 years</i>	<i>5-10 years</i>	<i>> 10 years</i>
Managers & Admin	-	-	50.0	-	50.0
Professionals	-	6.3	12.5	18.8	62.5
Asoc Prof & Nursing	-	1.2	3.6	48.2	47.0
Clerical & Related	-	9.1	29.5	36.4	25.0
Ancillary	11.1	22.2	22.2	44.4	-
Support Services	3.4	17.2	37.9	31.0	10.3

Chi-Square
78.95945

DF
24

Level of Significance
0.001

A relationship also exists though between length of service and earnings level.

Table 5.11 - Earnings Level by Length of Service					
<i>Earnings*</i>	<i>Length of Service %</i>				
	<i>< 1 year</i>	<i>1-2 years</i>	<i>2-5 years</i>	<i>5-10 years</i>	<i>> 10 years</i>
High	-	2.7	8.2	34.2	54.8
Low	1.6	8.5	20.2	41.1	28.7

Chi-Square
16.65414

DF
4

Level of Significance
0.01

* *Note: Low Earnings are defined as less than £200 per week net.*

As shown in table 5.11 high earners are more likely to have longer periods in the labour force. But what of the proposition that women with high earning potential are more likely to continue in employment than are other women?

Once again it is important to note that the average earnings of women in this sample were higher than for women as a whole in Northern Ireland. This may be attributed to the occupational distribution of the sample and to the fact that the vast majority were in full-time employment. But that aside, the majority of women in the sample could not be described as high earners with some 63.9% earning less than £200 (net) per week.

Table 5.12 below shows the relationship between earnings level and an intention to return to work following maternity leave.

Table 5.12 - Earnings Level by Employment Decision		
<i>Earnings*</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Low	62.8	37.2
High	89.0	11.0

Chi-Square
16.03227

DF
1

Level of Significance
0.001

* *Note: Low earnings are defined here as less than £200 per week net.*

Eighty-nine per cent of those in the "higher earnings" category intended to return to work compared to 62.8% of those with lower earnings and 72.3% of the sample as a whole. The chi-square test carried out on the data reveals that this is a statistically significant difference at the .001 % level. It seems clear from this as from other studies (eg Brannen and Moss 1991, McRae 1991) that women with high earnings are indeed more likely than low-earners to return to employment.

Support for the proposition that earnings is a factor of significance for the employment decision comes, almost ironically, from the responses and comments of non-returners also. Almost half of all non-returners, some 27 women, said they might have made a different decision, ie they might have decided to go back to work if they had had greater earnings potential. Even amongst those who claimed that their main reason for not going back was a desire to bring up their child themselves, a number did comment that if they had been a high earner, the example used was a doctor, they would have had to think twice about giving up work. A number of others, from the 82.0% of non-returners who said that a lack of childcare had influenced their decision to some extent, said that if they had been earning more they would have been able to afford the only (often expensive) childcare available to them. Or they said that it would have been "worth their while" in

a way that a return to work had not been when they would have to pay for childcare out of a take-home pay in some (18) cases of less than £125 per week and in some (34) cases less than £150 per week. This was especially significant since the majority of women saw payment for childcare as their personal responsibility if they were to "choose" to return to work. Similarly 67.0% of returners listed their own earnings potential as one of the three main factors influencing their decision to return. Clearly then women themselves saw their earnings level and potential as significant. A number made the comment that although at an emotional level they would have liked to stay at home with the child, on a practical level they felt it was wrong to deprive the family of what they saw as significant financial resources for their material needs. Several women commented to the effect that it would be unfair to expect their partner to shoulder all the household's financial burdens when they had the potential to earn good money.

In some cases too future earnings potential was considered as important, or more so, than present earnings. A number of returners commented that, although it was going to be "a bit of a struggle" and seemed "hardly worthwhile" at present, when their earnings were not very high and childcare was expensive, they were "going up the ladder" and so had to, as one put it "hang on in there" for the future. More than a quarter of the sample (28.2%) said they hoped to be promoted in the next two years.

Anticipation of promotion was shown to be significantly related to an intention to return at the .001% level. Table 5.13 below shows that 94.7% of those who had anticipated promotion intended to return compared to 63.4% of those not anticipating promotion.

Table 5.13 - Anticipated Promotion by Employment Decision		
<i>Promotion Prospects</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return</i>
Anticipate Promotion	94.7	5.3
Do Not Anticipate Promotion	63.4	36.6

Chi-Square
19.99054

DF
1

Level of Significance
0.001

Career reasons were the third most common "reason" given by returners as influencing their decision (following finances and personal satisfaction) and several of these women, in response to the open-ended questions, commented that they saw themselves having a good career ahead and as high-earners for the future.

The findings described above regarding the relationships between education, occupational level, length of service and earnings potential, suggest that whilst high earners are significantly more likely to return to employment following maternity leave, it is not a simplistic relationship. High-earners in this sample differed from low-earners in many respects other than the financial. As well as earning more money, they were also better educated; they were engaged in occupations which had educational requirements for entry, which were generally regarded as "higher status" occupations and which offered intrinsic as well as financial rewards; they had spent a longer time in the labour market and in health services in particular than non-returners.

Significant though earnings potential undoubtedly is then for employment decisions following maternity leave, it would be simplistic to assume that it stands alone as a factor influencing such decisions. Eight high earners were amongst those not intending to return and their cases will be revisited in a discussion of what makes them "different" from the

majority (89.0%) of high earners who did intend to return.

Financial factors clearly do play a large part in women's employment decisions following maternity leave. The statements "I'm going back for the money" or "we don't need the money for essentials" contain within them however many different and sometimes conflicting meanings which the women in this study found difficult, or were unwilling to articulate, and which are no less difficult to interpret. A key to the complexity may well lie not just in overall household income levels, nor in individual earning potential, but rather in perceptions of the relative significance of men's and women's employment and earnings for the household. Such perceptions are likely to be shaped by factors other than simply whether or not women decide to continue in employment after childbirth. Morris (1984) and others make the point that a full appreciation of the decision to continue in employment requires a consideration of both how the woman's wage is used, and her access to her husband or partner's wage. Both of which may be shaped by the way in which the household manages its financial matters and by the broader issue of how resources are shared within households. This is something which is in turn influenced by the attitudes, beliefs and ideologies which shape overall household relationships. Taking account of such influences, and bearing in mind the need to locate the individual actor within a partnership and a household, it is necessary to consider the influence which such "household relationships" may have upon employment decisions following maternity leave.

HOUSEHOLD RELATIONSHIPS

Amongst the theories of "why mothers work" critically reviewed in Chapter I were those

which would suggest that part of the explanation of why women decide for or against a return to work following childbirth lies in the way in which both the household's resources and its burdens are shared between the woman and her partner and the degree of access which she enjoys to the household's principal resources of money and time.

Sharing Financial Resources

A number of studies such as those of Morris (1990), suggest that a woman may be motivated to return to work by a desire to escape from distributional conflicts and in order to gain some control over income and financial resources, Vogler (1989) suggests that in households using an allowance system of management women who do not earn may have no personal spending money. Based on evidence such as this it is possible to construct a probabilistic relationship between the system of management used for household finances and the likelihood of a woman returning to work following maternity leave. This study explored the strength of the relationship between the type of financial management used and the likelihood of a return to work, the proposition having been put that a woman is less likely to return to work if the household uses a joint management/sharing system than if it has a male managed allowance or whole wage system.

Using an adapted version of Pahl's (1989) typology of household management systems, the women in this study were asked to describe their system of financial management prior to maternity leave. They were asked to do so in terms of whether they or their partner had solely managed the money (ie a "whole wage system"); whether they had

been given a housekeeping allowance by their partner; whether they had jointly managed finances or whether their earnings and finances had been kept entirely separate.

Table 5.14 - Sample by Household Financial Management	
<i>Management System</i>	<i>%</i>
Female Whole Wage	21.8
Male Whole Wage	2.0
Allowance	3.0
Joint Management	41.6
Separate	31.2
Other	0.5
Total	100.0

Table 5.14 shows that for the sample as a whole joint management was the single most popular arrangement used by 41.6% of households. In support of this almost half of the sample (48.5%) said that they had a joint bank or building society account with their partner.

Table 5.15 - Household Financial Management by Employment Decision		
<i>Management System</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Female Whole Wage	70.5	29.5
Male Whole Wage	25.0	75.0
Allowance	50.0	50.0
Joint/Pooling	73.8	26.2
Separate	76.2	23.8
Other	100.0	-

Chi-Square
6.98444

DF
5

Level of Significance
> 0.20

Of those who had used a joint management system, table 5.15 shows that 73.8% intended to return almost exactly replicating the proportion of returners in the sample as a whole. This was also true however of those who had used a female whole wage system, in which the woman claimed that she had looked after all the household money except her partner's personal spending money. A similar picture emerged in respect of the substantial number (31.2% of the sample) who said that they had kept their finances completely separate from those of their partner. Some 76.2% of such women intended to return. Only the male whole wage and the allowance systems, used by a tiny minority of households, showed any reversal of this trend, with half of those who had had an allowance system and 75.0% of those with a male management system not intending to return. There is little evidence then to support the proposition that the likelihood of a woman returning to work will be influenced by the type of system used for household financial management. These findings suggest that women were not returning to work in order to escape the distributional conflicts likely to arise from an allowance system or to gain access to money for personal use which might be denied them in a system where their partner managed all the household finances. The numbers using such systems however were very small and it is rather more tempting to claim from the available evidence that the system of financial management used by the household in fact had little or no effect upon the likelihood of a woman returning to work following the birth of a child. Those using a joint management system were only marginally less likely to return than those who kept their finances completely separate. This lack of any significant difference was borne out by the results of the chi-square test carried out on the data which revealed no statistically significant differences in the likelihood of return between women from households using joint management or other systems.

It must be said however that a degree of confusion or misunderstanding did arise on this matter in some interviews. From the comments made by a number of women in the "separate arrangements" category it became apparent that this system was in fact just another way of sharing the burden of the household's financial responsibilities. They and their partners although they kept their finances "completely separate" each had their own well defined areas of responsibility. One example was where the mortgage was paid by direct debit from a woman's account whilst her partner paid all fuel bills from his account. Or the woman bought all the food while he paid the mortgage. Therefore although this was described as "keeping finances separate" they were in fact interdependent and in a way were managing "jointly" the needs of the household. In reviewing the responses in this area it seems likely that there may well have been some ambiguity and some differences in interpretation of what was meant by "separate" finances. It does not seem to have meant that they had had full control or choice over what to do with their earnings. Similarly, it would be a mistake to assume that because women talked in the ideological vocabulary of "sharing" and even in many cases combined their finances in joint accounts, they did not label their money for particular aspects of household expenditure. When the main uses of women's earnings were listed it became clear that they did have very clearly defined areas of expenditure. Thus the contrast between the majority of women who had experienced joint or separate management of household finances may not be so stark as at first sight. Nor is the contrast quite so stark between these women, who mainly intended to return to work and the minority of women who, although they had not had equal access to, or control of household finances even when they were in employment, did not intend to return and therefore it must be assumed had few concerns about or little interest in the control of household finances or financial independence. From the proposition as originally stated

it would have seemed likely that such women would have returned to work following maternity leave, however they in common with the majority of returners seemed to have little personal interest in money.

The findings in this area of household financial management serve to underline the complexity of these decisions, and the need to beware of simplistic assumptions. The way in which money is managed in a partnership is an emotionally loaded subject which may well be indicative or symptomatic of the nature of the relationship, the balance of power within the household and of perceptions regarding the significance of both male and female earnings. The allocative systems used by the household will be, as observed by Pahl (1984), shaped in various ways. Her study, for example, found a statistically significant relationship between a woman's level of earnings and the way household finances were managed, with high earners and their partners more likely to use joint or separate systems, and low earners more likely to use whole wage or housekeeping allowance systems. The type of system used is likely to be mediated too by class, socialisation and normative attitudes to gender roles.

With the available evidence only speculation is possible as to why this hypothesis was not borne out. It might be that although women from jointly managed households were just as likely to return to work after maternity leave as those with separate arrangements they were going back from rather different motives. Those who have not had access to their partner's income in the past because finances were kept completely separate, might well assume that if they did not go back to work and earn their "own" money they would continue to have little or no access to their partner's income and hence no access to any financial resources if his was to be the sole income. Women who had been used to a

system which gave them equal access to and a substantial degree of control over all the households income might on the other hand be motivated to return by a desire to maintain or restore such a system.

The evidence from this study did not support a linkage in a single direction between household financial management and the likelihood of a return to employment. It is perhaps useful in gaining more understanding of the complexity of this issue to consider specifically the position of the minority of women who did not intend to return to work and to explore what, if anything, that decision might mean for them in terms of changes in the way the household would be managed and the degree of access to finances which they might expect to retain or acquire.

The majority of non-returners, as in the sample as a whole, claimed to have had a considerable degree of control in household finances before going on maternity leave. This was exercised either through a joint management system, used by nearly 40.0% of non-returners, through keeping finances separate (26.8%) or because they had personally managed all the household finances, other than partners' personal spending money (23.2%). The majority (55.4%) recognised that the system for managing household finances would change in the future, with one income instead of two. More than a quarter of those who anticipated change saw it as being towards more joint management. Few of those who had a female "whole wage" system saw themselves remaining in control of household finances and the majority anticipated a move to a housekeeping allowance allocated by their partner. At the time of interview they had had as yet no experience of this type of system which might indicate the ease or otherwise by which distribution might be handled or the availability of personal spending money within such

a system. In commenting upon factors which might have reversed their decision, only two of the non-returners made any mention of a desire for personal spending money or for financial independence. This apparent lack of concern with access to, or control of, finances, was not however confined to those not intending to return to work. Only 11.6% of returners rated it at all in the factors which had influenced their decision - an unsurprising finding perhaps, given that the use of earnings for personal spending was of no statistical significance in the employment decisions of the sample as a whole. Only a very small number, some five women, in their general comments at the end of the interview mentioned that they would "hate to have to ask for money" or "confessed" that "I suppose I've got used to having my own money".

In general this was a difficult area to investigate and one in which interviewees were least likely to "open up". To some extent this was to be expected given that, as others have argued, romantic love, communicative togetherness and emotional sharing are the salient ideals of modern marriage (Burgoyne 1987). There tends to be a strong belief in the need for "sharing" within relationships, even when that might not be the reality of the situation. It was hoped to shed some further light upon the degree to which control of, or access to household finances, might be linked to the likelihood of women returning to work by getting away from such emotionally charged issues as "sharing". Instead it was intended to explore what women's earnings were used for before they became a mother, and what it was planned to use them for if they intended to return. This was considered useful as a further indicator of "access" because a number of studies (eg, Morris, 1984 & 1990, Brannen 1987) suggest that in many households, whatever the system of management used, women still do not have any real "control" over finances. Even where they are themselves in paid employment this does not necessarily give them access to

money in any real sense of significant "additional" funds being available for their own use. In many cases women are working to augment inadequate housekeeping funds, and rather than increasing their power and degree of control in the household they may be simply reducing demands on the man's wage, possibly freeing funds for use at his discretion. A further issue regarding who actually had access to and use of household finances stems from the fact that for many women in employment the main "dedicated" use of their income is in fact in support of the dual-earner lifestyle per se. This may include paying for childcare and domestic help, purchase and maintenance of a second car and of labour saving devices, and more reliance on convenience foods. Is it then reasonable to suggest that women return to work in order to have "their own" money"? The women in this study were asked what their earnings had mainly been used for before they went on maternity leave, and (if applicable) what the main uses would be when they returned to work.

Table 5.16 - Pre-Maternity Use of Earnings in Order of Importance	
	<i>Use</i>
	Food
	Rent/Mortgage
	Fuel
	Clothing and Shoes Self
	Personal Spending
	Savings and Insurance
	Car Expenses
	Holidays/Nights Out
	Repairs/Decorating

Table 5.17 - Returners Main Uses of Earnings in Order of Importance	
<i>Use</i>	
	Food
	Rent/Mortgage
	Fuel
	Childcare
	Personal Spending
	Car Expenses
	Clothing and Shoes

Tables 5.16 and 5.17 above show the main areas of expenditure. By far the most significant items, both pre and post maternity, were food and rent or mortgage. Clearly these are essential items of household expenditure which to some extent contradicts the claims of the majority of both returners and non-returners that before becoming a mother they had worked to "pay for extras". An explanation of this apparent contradiction may again lie in the perceptions of the significance of women's employment and earnings. Brannen and Moss (1991) reported respondents who said their earnings were for luxuries even when they paid the mortgage and the authors interpreted this as part of the discourse on the unimportance of women's jobs. In this study women and their partners perceived their jobs as optional in some cases and in most cases secondary to the man's job. This despite the very interesting fact that 45.0% of women had been earning as much as their partners and 16.0% had been earning more than he was.

This was perhaps a reflection of the culture of impermanence surrounding women's employment; a way of coping with the knowledge that if things didn't "work out" it would be the woman in the partnership, who regardless of her relative earnings, would be most likely to have to leave her job. Under such circumstances to say that earnings are for extras is to imply that they can be done without if necessary.

Some of the rationale for why women contributed towards certain areas of expenditure and not others may have come from the ways in which they and their partners were paid. More than 80.0% of the women in the sample had been paid monthly, compared with less than 65.0% of husbands or partners. In households where the woman was paid monthly and her partner weekly she was typically an associate professional, most often a nurse, while her partner was a skilled manual worker, often an electrician, joiner or mechanic. In such households the woman's monthly earnings would often be used for monthly bills such as housing costs, or for the "big" monthly shopping when they stocked up on staple items. The husband's weekly earnings, sometimes paid in cash, were used for immediately required items such as fresh foods, petrol and for leisure activities. One woman did comment that because her husband was paid cash and the childminder liked cash payments he would probably "end up" paying for childcare when he (as planned) collected the baby each Friday.

Whilst childcare was not the main item of expenditure anticipated by returners, it was seen as being less important than housing costs, food and fuel, nonetheless 65.0% of returners said that childcare would be paid for out of their own earnings. And the amount women were prepared to pay for childcare was related to their own earnings, rather than household income, at a statistically significant level.

This is perhaps yet another example of the lack of control, choice and access to financial resources which women do actually have, despite an appearance of financial independence stemming from having their own earnings.

Interestingly, perhaps, 39.3% of non-returners said that their earnings had been used for rent or mortgages before maternity leave and 75.0% said they had paid for food. In such circumstances it was sometimes hard to imagine how the sole remaining household income was to be stretched to meet all requirements.

On the one hand the findings above, and in particular the quantifiable responses, do seem to indicate that women who have been used to equal access to, and a degree of control over household finances, through either a joint or separate system of management, will be likely to return to work in order to maintain that access or control. On the other hand, it is apparent from the findings that the majority of women, other than perhaps those in the top-earnings bracket, will actually gain little personally from their earnings and have little real choice or control over how they are to be spent. This is consistent with recent analyses of SCEL (the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative) which suggest that changes in labour market participation are not leading to greater equality in household financial arrangements in any deterministic way. (Vogler and Pahl, 1993). Such findings and the fact that the majority of returners (88.4%) and all non-returners said that money for personal spending had not been important to them even prior to becoming a mother, suggest that a desire for financial independence is not the "reason" why mothers continue in employment. That, and a lack of statistical significance in the difference between various systems of household management, reinforce the view that going back "for the money" is not in itself a sufficient explanation for women's employment decisions following maternity leave.

Sharing Time and Domestic Labour

Money is not of course the only resource available to, and valued by, household members. Nor is it the only resource whose allocation is shaped by factors such as earnings and employment status and mediated by class, socialisation and normative attitudes to gender roles (Pahl, 1989). Time, and in particular personal time, "free" time, time away from both paid and unpaid work, is another resource which may be made available by courtesy of the "power relationship" which exists within the household (Blood and Wolfe 1960). It is the sharing of domestic labour and childcare which largely determines the amount of the time resource available to each member of the household. Hence the degree to which domestic labour and childcare are shared, and consequently the amount of time to which she has, or will have, access, may well be a further factor to be considered by women in deciding whether or not to return to work following the birth of a child. This is an area of some significance for as Arber and Gilbert (1992) comment "the nature and extent of women's participation in waged work is intimately connected with their unpaid domestic labour as mothers and housewives" (p.1) and as Brannen and Moss (1991) suggest "few women are prepared to take on what is seen as a "double burden" of employment and domestic responsibilities" (p.69).

Evidence from a number of studies (eg, Dex 1988, Hochschild 1989) suggested the construction of the proposition that *"a woman is more likely to return to work the more equally she and her partner share responsibility for childcare and for household tasks."*

Women were asked about the degree to which they and their partner shared the "core" jobs of cleaning, laundry, cooking and shopping and whether the degree of sharing had

changed since they became parents. They were asked too how they shared in caring for the baby at present and, if they intended to return to work, how they would share in the future.

Their responses show that the experiences of women taking part in this study are not significantly different to the experiences of women in earlier surveys (see Montgomery 1993, Hochschild 1989). More than 54% of women said that they did all or most of the household tasks themselves and 44.6% claimed that there was less sharing of domestic work now than there had been before the baby was born. Most were swift to point out however that this was inevitable; since they were at home all day at present, on maternity leave, it was natural, "only fair" that they should be doing the bulk of the household work. This point was made too in relation to caring for the baby - which only 11.4% said was shared equally at present. Again women were anxious to excuse their partners and to deny any lack of willingness on their part. They frequently commented to the effect that "well I am at home with him/her all day, so it wouldn't be fair to ask him to do much after a days work". Similarly they were quick to praise, one saying "to be fair he is very goodhe brings things home from town for me because I can't get out so easily ...nappies and things that are bulky". Several women commented that they couldn't really expect their partner to help with night feeds or even just "lifting" the baby during the night because "he does have to get up for work in the morning". Probably the most frequently heard comment was that "men are a bit afraid with babies when they're very young ...he'll be more help when she's up a bit".

Those intending to return to work however anticipated a dramatic increase in male participation in childcare, especially, in the future. Nearly half of the returners said that

the father would share equally in looking after the baby (aside from paid childcare) and a rather surprising eight women said that care would "mostly" be provided by their husbands. The general position regarding household work and childcare is perhaps unsurprising given the evidence from other studies. When it comes to testing the strength of the relationship between the degree of sharing and the likelihood of a return to work however, some interesting differences are revealed in the position of returners vis a vis non-returners.

Table 5.18 - Sharing Housework and Childcare by Employment Decision		
<i>Sharing</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
No Sharing of Housework	45.5	54.5
Equal Sharing of Housework	86.6	13.4
No Sharing of Childcare	29.0	71.0
Equal Sharing of Childcare	73.9	26.1

	<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>Level of Significance</u>
(Housework)	20.25948	4	0.001
(Childcare)	34.68872	2	0.001

Table 5.18 above shows that more than 85.0% of those who claimed to share housework equally intended to return to work at the end of their maternity leave, compared to just 45.5% of those who said that they did all or most of it themselves. Similarly, 73.9% of those (admittedly a minority) claiming equal sharing of childcare intended to return, compared to just 29.0% of those who did not have "sharing" partners. Chi-square tests carried out on the data reveal that these are, in both cases, statistically significant differences at the .001% level.

Such differences do seem to support the proposition that a woman will be more likely to return to work the more equally she and her partner share household tasks and childcare, and hence it is assumed, the more access she has to free time and personal time. It is tempting to say that women are clearly "voting with their feet" and refusing to take on the "double burden" or the "second shift" (Hochschild 1989). But there is something a little disconcerting about this statistically significant relationship between household sharing and the likelihood of a return to work. Most of the women in this study had not as yet actually experienced the reality of equal sharing in childcare and household tasks; just over half (57.9%) of partners had even taken leave, paid or unpaid, from work when their child was born. In addition to this, whilst recent work from Horrell (1994) and Gershuny et al (1994) does suggest a significant, if relatively small and gradual, shift in men's efforts, the evidence still overwhelmingly points to the continued persistence of the traditional homemaker role for women. Throughout this area of the study there was always a suspicion that what was being experienced was something of a triumph of hope over reality!

As with the sharing of household finances, the sharing of household burdens, and thus the availability of household and personal time, is related to factors such as employment status and earning potential.

Table 5.19 - Sharing Housework by Earnings		
<i>Sharing</i>	<i>Low Earners</i>	<i>High Earners*</i>
No Sharing of Housework	69.9	30.2
Equal Sharing of Housework	29.5	60.3

* *Note: High earners were also more likely to employ someone to do the housework*
- 6.8% did so compared to just 0.8% of low earners.

Table 5.19 shows that 60.3 % of high-earning women in this study reported equal sharing of domestic work, compared to 29.5 % of low earners. The degree of sharing will be influenced too by normative attitudes to gender roles. The Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey (Stringer and Robinson, 1993) in which half of all respondents felt that a women's duty is to stay at home and devote the major part of her attention to her children, also found that 87.0% of respondents saw general domestic duties as mainly the province of women, and 84.0% saw childcare as mainly the responsibility of women. All of which suggests that the normative attitudes to gender roles in many Northern Ireland households may not encourage equal sharing in household tasks and childcare whatever the employment decision made by a woman on becoming a mother.

The proposition that women are more likely to return to employment the more equally they and their partner share childcare and housework does nonetheless seem to have some validity. There is certainly a statistically significant difference between returners and non-returners in the degree of sharing, although in itself this may not be a sufficiently important "reason" for women to return to employment following maternity leave (only 34.0% of returners rated it as an influence, however small, in their decision). What does seem important is that a willingness to share domestic work and childcare, and a belief that it should be shared, may well be indicative of a more liberal attitude among the sample towards gender roles in general than is the norm in Northern Ireland society. Attitudes towards gender roles are likely to mediate not only patterns of household sharing but also decisions on whether mothers "should" work. It is to a third set of factors relating to attitudes, ideologies and beliefs on motherhood and employment that attention must now turn.

ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, IDEOLOGIES

Throughout this study the women who made employment decisions following maternity leave were viewed as creative actors making a variety of choices and decisions regarding their roles as mothers and as employees. In exploring the, often powerful, attitudes, beliefs and ideologies which may have played a part in influencing those choices and decisions, there is however a danger of coming to regard these as something imposed upon and rather passively accepted by the women concerned. Whilst it is clearly important to recognise and to take account of the historical and ideological contexts in which these women were making their decisions it needs to be acknowledged also that as creative actors they undoubtedly negotiated their own meanings of motherhood and employment in both their beliefs and practices. It is more appropriate then to regard dominant ideologies as not only part of the social context within which mothers made their decisions, but also as a resource upon which they undoubtedly would draw in the construction of whatever meanings motherhood and employment would hold for them.

In this study women's attitudes and orientations to work were examined as were partners' attitudes to their wives' jobs. The study also sought to explore broader areas of women's beliefs, ideologies and attitudes concerning motherhood and employment, and their partner's views on these issues. Whilst these were to be the main foci they inevitably lead to a consideration of the ideologies and attitudes of the wider society, and in particular in the workplace, where women are also subject to images of what it does and does not mean to be a working mother, and where work practices and conditions will inevitably be influenced by such beliefs and attitudes.

Attitudes to "Working Mothers"

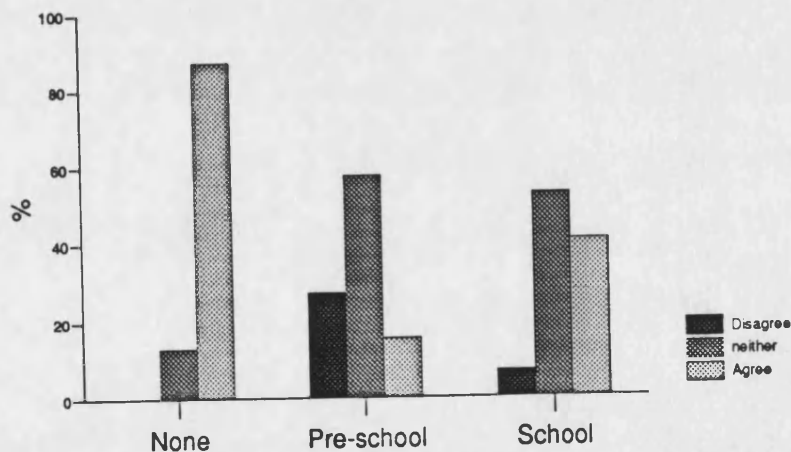
In the introduction to the study it was observed that throughout the twentieth century, despite having fewer children motherhood has expanded in most women's lives, attracting new duties and a new significance and requiring new skills. No more are mothers seen simply as the main providers for their children's physical health and well being; they have come to be regarded as vital to children's emotional and cognitive development. From Bowlby (1951) to the contemporary emphasis on optimising child development, the view has largely been that "the young child should have a warm intimate and continuous relationship with his mother" (Bowlby (1951) p.361)

The detrimental effects of maternal separation became the single most important post war theory of child development; the corollary of full-time motherhood being that mothers should not be employed, certainly not while their children were young. This theme of "normal" full-time motherhood has not been entirely unchanged over the years however. Ideas about maternal employment have also, to some extent, evolved. There is some evidence, for example, from social attitudes surveys, of a growing, if grudging, acceptance of maternal employment, but certainly not positive approval. Whilst the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey (Stringer and Robinson 1993) for example found strong support (71.0%) for a woman's right to work, only 47.0% felt that women should try to combine a career with raising children. Thirty-six per cent did however feel that working part-time is acceptable when there is a pre-school child. Nonetheless it seems probable that any growing acceptance of maternal employment assumes that the major responsibility for children and their development remains with mothers; maternal employment therefore is only acceptable if women continue to discharge this responsibility.

It is in the context of such a dominant ideology that this study sought to explore the attitudes of women and their partners to maternal employment in general and to their own job in particular. In so doing, it was hoped to determine the strength of the relationship between a particular employment orientation, and the likelihood of a woman continuing in employment following childbirth. It was also hoped to determine the significance for the employment decision of her partner's attitudes and the support which he offered.

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements regarding women in employment. Figure 4 below illustrates the disparity between how women felt about women's "right to work" in general and their views on maternal employment.

Figure 4: Attitudes to women working



Eighty seven per cent of respondents agreed that a married woman with no children should go out to work, and only 12.9% desisted from expressing a view of this issue. They were less prepared to express a view regarding the desirability of women with

school age children working. Whilst more than 40.0% agreed that women with school age children should go out to work, the majority, 52.5% neither agreed nor disagreed and most commented that it would be up to the woman herself. When it came to commenting on women with pre-school children, only 15.3% of the sample felt that they should go out to work, 27.2% disagreed with such a course of action and the majority again, 57.4%, refrained from expressing a view. These then were the views of women, some 72.3% of whom had themselves indicated an intention to return to work following maternity leave, ie. when their child was less than six months old. Whilst many did see a contradiction between their views and practices others were seemingly more concerned with expressing non-judgemental, unbiased views. The findings above represent the quantitative response to structured questions coded for analysis. A qualitative analysis of comments made at that point in the interview or in response to the invitation for comments or suggestions made towards the close shows that such responses were marked in many instances by nuance and reservation. Some commented that it was only acceptable for the mother of a young child to be employed in certain circumstances such as if the family needed the money for essentials, or if the woman had a career and her skills and training would be wasted by a withdrawal from the labour force. The principal reservations expressed concerned the child and the need to make sure that he or she did not suffer. A number of those intending to return said that, although they did not in general agree that mothers of very young children should work, it was OK in their own case because their own mother would be taking care of the child, and that was "just as good, maybe better than doing it myself because she has plenty of experience and a lot more patience". The "blood-tie" involved seemed very important to many of those women who said it was alright if you were leaving the child "with one of your own ... I wouldn't leave him/her with strangers".

A number of women however also "confessed" to anxieties "outside" the formal interview as it were - whilst making a cup of tea afterwards. Many of the doubts and anxieties aired at that time hinged upon the ideologically salient question of the harm and disruption which might be caused to the mother-child relationship by the separation. Even a number of those who were content in the knowledge that their own mother, or a close relative, would be caring for the child, expressed a worry that the child might "forget" who its real mother was or that the special "closeness" of the one-to-one mother-child relationship might be lost. The "expert" opinion of the interviewers was frequently sought on such issues.

But the anxieties expressed by the women also sometimes had a material basis in individual situations. A number of women were, reasonably, concerned about the feasibility of getting the child ready with all its equipment, including changes of clothes, etc. delivering it to a childminder or nursery, and still being on duty themselves before 8.00am each day.

Hence the continuing power of the ideology of the "all responsible" mother, amongst even those women intending to return to full-time work in a demanding job, was very apparent. Of primary interest of course is whether the attitudes of returners, who were the majority in the sample, differed from those of non-returners on issues relating to maternal employment and this is illustrated in table 5.20.

Table 5.20 - Attitude to Pre-School Mothers by Employment Decision		
<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Should work	93.5	6.5
Shouldn't work	45.5	54.5
Neither	79.3	20.7

Chi-Square
29.61201

DF
2

Level of Significance
0.001

Overall 27.2% of the sample disagreed with mothers of young children working. Of these nearly 55.0% did not themselves intend to continue in employment. Chi-square tests carried out on the data revealed that there were statistically significant differences at the .001% level between returners and non-returners in terms of their attitudes to mothers of pre-school children working. The vast majority of the remainder of non-returners neither agreed nor disagreed and several commented that whilst they knew what was right for them personally they would not "impose" their views on others. It is perhaps somewhat intriguing that two of those not intending to return actually agreed with mothers of pre-school children working. The apparent contradiction is however rather easily explained. Both had intended to return to work and before the birth had arranged to do so. One had however been "surprised" by the birth of twins and felt that she could not now ask her mother to cope (as previously planned) because of the double work load. The other woman had a sick child who had already required surgery. She had been a nurse on permanent night duty and had intended to return to that work leaving her husband responsible for childcare during the night and with help from a neighbour for a few hours each day. Her husband was now however "frightened" to be left alone with

a sick child and she felt she had no alternative but to leave her job for the foreseeable future.

The attitudes of returners to mothers with young children working do, at a statistical level at least, appear to differ from those of non-returners. Just over 17% of returners disagreed compared to more than 54% of non-returners. In interpreting these findings however a number of factors must be borne in mind. The vast majority of women had by this stage made their employment decision. They had already categorised themselves as "returners" or otherwise. Thus it seems inevitable that a degree of post hoc rationalisation will have crept into responses. Both returners and non-returners no doubt wanted to feel, and to demonstrate, that they had acted in accordance with what they "believed" to be the best thing to do. Significant numbers of both groups did not want to express a view on whether mothers of pre-school children "should" work, perhaps for fear of appearing judgemental.

Having acted, in the main, in accordance with their own beliefs, they were prepared to leave others to do so also. No doubt many of the 64.0% of returners who said they neither agreed nor disagreed with mothers working when children were very young had a view that it was either right for them personally, or that they could justify it in their own case, but they were not prepared to say what others should do. Having made their own decision however it seems that some respondents, in each category, felt a need to defend or justify that decision in terms of their own attitudes or beliefs regarding maternal employment. The majority of non-returners, for example, gave an "other" factor as the main influence in their decision not to return. When those other reasons were explored the great majority related to a desire to be with their child, to bring up the

child themselves, a "belief" that young children need their mother, When invited to make general comments again non-returners said things such as "I've always believed that if you have children you should look after them yourself - that's the way I was brought up" or "I suppose it's a bit old fashioned really but I feel it is my responsibility, I can't leave it to someone else" and "I can understand that some people really need to work but I do feel sorry for anyone who has to go back ...you must feel so bad if you miss any of the 'firsts' "

Those intending to return to work displayed their own brand of posthoc rationalisation; many had adopted coping strategies for their own particular situation and used various means of reconciling the ideology of all-responsible motherhood with their own actions. In particular a number of those intending to return emphasised the gains for the mother-child relationship from such a course of action. They mentioned often the notion of "quality time", as in the comment "it's not the quantity so much as the quality of time you spend with your child that matters ...I think I'll be a lot more interested in doing things with her than if I was at home all day". They mentioned too the reflected benefits for the child of having a happy and fulfilled mother.

Such developments in women's thinking, though, should not be exaggerated or overstated. Any new themes that there may be in the discourse on maternal employment are at best emergent, and in most respects modest. Mothers in the sample were not even beginning to question women's primary responsibility for children. Whilst the possibility of compensating for the absence of full-time motherhood was being recognised to some extent in the somewhat defensive comments above, the status of full-time motherhood as the standard against which all other types should be judged, was not really being

questioned even amongst women who were themselves intending to return to full-time employment. In these comments there is much evidence that, important as our attitudes and beliefs may be, it should not be assumed that our thoughts and feelings will always have a direct bearing on behaviour. For that reason it cannot be assumed, as is demonstrated in the findings above, that all women who disagree with maternal employment will refrain from working themselves. What can be said with a degree of certainty is that those who hold such views seem to be less likely than others to return to employment following maternity leave.

The relationship between attitudes and behaviours is complex; categorical statements on a direct causal link are fraught with dangers. The caution which must be exercised in linking mothers' employment decisions with their attitudes to maternal employment applies equally to any consideration of the link between partners' attitudes and the likelihood of a woman continuing in employment following the birth of a child.

Partners' Attitudes

One of the theories propounded in Chapter I is that a woman is more likely to return to work if her partner views her job as important and encourages and supports her in her decision.

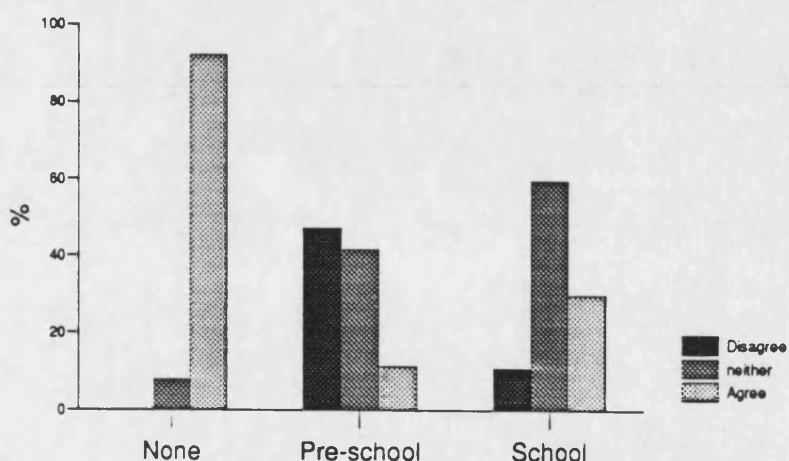
Brannen and Moss (1991) comment that, given the widespread normative disapproval in the wider society towards women's full-time employment when children are very young, (what has been referred to here as the "dominant ideology" regarding motherhood and employment), it does seem that partners' attitudes and support are likely to be of

considerable significance for the decisions which women make regarding employment following maternity leave.

In an attempt to explore that significance, women in this study were asked not only to articulate what they believed to be their partner's views regarding maternal employment but also to indicate what his attitude was to her work specifically, and whether he had been involved in the decision regarding a return to work.

Figure 5 shows partners attitudes to maternal employment as expressed by the women at interview.

Figure 5: Partners' Attitudes to women working



Whilst 92.1% of partners were believed to approve of women working when they did not have children, this figure had shrunk dramatically to a reported 29.7% approval for working women with school age children and even more dramatically to a reported 11.4% approval for those with pre-school children. Forty-seven percent of women stated their partner would disagree with women going out to work when they had pre-school children.

From this evidence, it would appear that, contrary to the original proposition, partners attitudes did not greatly influence women's decisions. More than 72.0% of women intended to return, yet only a reported 11.4% of partners approved of mothers with young children working. This seems to be reinforced by the fact that 94.5% of returners claimed that their decision had not been influenced by their partner's attitude. Almost as strongly, 83.9% of non-returners said that their partner's attitude had not influenced their decision.

Despite this seemingly outright refutation of the proposition that partners attitudes and support are significant for women's employment decisions, 79.9% of the sample did say that they had discussed the decision with their partner and 39.1% said that the decision had been made jointly with their partner. These latter responses perhaps again reflecting the ideology of "sharing" important to many of the women, which did not come through however when asked to rate the importance of various influences.

Table 5.21 - Partner's Reported Attitude to Return by Employment Decision		
<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Should Return	100.0	-
Should Not Return	-	100.0
"Up to You"	81.8	18.2
"Up to You" conditionally	64.7	35.3

Chi-square
61.14457

DF
4

Level of Significance
0.001

Table 5.21 suggests that although most men had left the decision up to the woman

herself, albeit on occasion with some conditions attached, when partners had expressed a firm view that a woman "should" or "should not" return, the woman involved; 15 returners and 18 non-returners had complied with his wishes, In terms of statistical significance too,chi-square tests carried out on this data showed partners' views to be highly significant for the decision made.

Given the importance which women attached to their partners support with, for example, more than half of all returners claiming that childcare would be equally shared, this degree of compliance, where views were strongly held, is perhaps unsurprising.

Of interest, of course is whether the partners of non-returners were any more likely than those of returners to disapprove of working mothers. And given their views on maternal employment in general, how had these men viewed their partner's job?

Table 5.22 - Partner's Reported Attitude to Pre-school Mothers by Employment Decision		
<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Should Work	87.0	13.0
Should Not Work	57.9	42.1
Neither	84.5	15.5

Chi-Square
18.56823

D F
2

Level of Significance
0.001

Almost half (47%) of the men were said to "disapprove" of mothers working when they had pre-school children. The wives of those who disapproved were, however, much less likely to have planned a return to work than women whose partners either approved of working mothers or were said to have no views on the subject. Table 5.22 above shows that less than 60% of those with "disapproving" partners intended to return compared to

nearly 90% of those whose partners were said to approve. This was a statistically significant difference at the .001% level.

A number of reservations must however be added. Firstly, husbands and partners were not interviewed and asked directly for their views. The quantitative responses expressed above reflect women's perception or interpretation, of what they thought their partner's attitude would be. Hence, there is no certainty that the views are completely accurate in all cases. It may well be that some women in both returner and non-returner groups wanted to portray their partners in agreement with, and approving the course of action upon which they personally had decided, thereby depicting again an image of sharing, agreement and closeness within the relationship. Whilst it can be claimed from the quantitative evidence available that non-returners as a group were significantly more likely to have partners who disapproved of maternal employment, it does appear that in general men (as reported by their partners) were more likely to disapprove of mothers of young children working than are women. They would also appear to be more judgemental and to have more dogmatic views on the subject than the women who would be more affected by decisions. Just 27.2% of women disagreed that such women should work, compared to a reported 47.0% of men. More than 57.0% were unwilling to express a view, suggesting it should be up to the individual, compared to a reported 41.6% of men in this category.

A partner's attitude to the woman's specific job may, however, be even more telling, not least because responses to the question on husband/partner's attitude to the woman's job pre-maternity may give some indication of whether he would support her in her decision to return or not. In Chapter I the proposition was put forward that "a woman will be

more likely to return to work if her partner views her job as important to her well-being ... (and) sees her earnings as important or necessary to the household's living standards."

Women were asked to indicate which of seven statements most closely described what had been her partner's attitude to her job. Of particular interest were responses relating to the woman's well-being and those relating to finances. Table 5.23 below shows the relationship between partner's reported attitude to her job and the eventual employment decision which the woman made.

Table 5.23 - Partner's Reported Attitude to Job by Employment Decision		
<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Necessary Financially	77.6	22.4
Useful for Extras	55.2	44.8
Something to Do	-	100.0
Gave Satisfaction	72.7	27.3
Made use of Education	86.1	13.9
Normal Thing to do	93.3	6.7

Chi-Square
23.92648

DF
5

Level of Significance
0.001

The majority of partners (62.2%) were said to have viewed the woman's job in financial terms; with more than half of those, 33.3% stating that their husband or partner had felt their job was necessary for household finances. This was a not unexpected response given that 47.0% of women had themselves claimed that the most important use of their salary, pre-maternity, had been for housing costs, and a further 38.1% said that it had been used, most importantly, to buy food. It is somewhat at odds however with the claim from most women that their main reason for working pre maternity had been "to pay for extras". This may have been due to some differences between what women felt would constitute "necessities" for themselves and for their partners. It may again however have been an attempt in reporting the woman's own views, to underplay the

significance of female earnings for the household's standard of living, they may have wished to play down the significance of their earnings because they had already made the decision to cease earning and hence knew that they had to do without the earnings in the future. By saying that they had been working "for extras" was to imply that their earnings were not really necessary or not essential for the household and therefore could be done without. A large percentage of non-returners, just under half of that group (46.4%) also said that their partner's view of their job had been that it paid for extras.

Returners, perhaps more surprisingly, themselves did not attach great significance to the financial importance of their earnings, but they were more willing to acknowledge that their partners had regarded their earnings as "necessary" for household finances. More than 35.0% of returners said that their partner had regarded their job to be necessary financially compared to just 26.8% of non-returners. It does appear therefore that women were rather more likely to return to work following maternity leave if their partner considered their job important to the household's living standards, and chi-square tests carried out on the data indicated that the differences were statistically significant. But what of the other part of the proposition that a woman is more likely to return to work if her partner views her job as important to her own well-being? Overall, just over 10.9% of women said that their partner felt that their job gave them satisfaction and a sense of identity. This small proportion again perhaps represents a way women, in particular non-returners, but returners too, fail to attach much significance to the importance of their job for their own well-being. This may have been again a reflection of the culture of impermanence surrounding women's employment - if one said that the job was what gave one's sense of identity then how could giving it up be contemplated? And most women recognised that it might be necessary to give up their jobs at some time

in the future. Or this finding may have stemmed from the "dominant ideology" that women who were mothers should get their satisfaction and sense of identity from motherhood, rather than relying upon a job to provide it.

Whatever the reasons, partners of returners (11.0%) were felt to be only marginally more likely than those of non-returners (10.7%) to view their job as important for their satisfaction, sense of identity and hence well-being.

Overall, it would appear that there is a statistically significant relationship between her partner's attitude to her job and the likelihood of a woman returning to work following maternity leave. Those whose partners considered the job important because their earnings were necessary for household finances, were more likely to return. Those whose partners considered the job important for giving satisfaction and a sense of identity were also more likely to return. Women whose partners had thought their earnings "useful for extras" were only marginally more likely to intend to return (55.2%) compared to the 44.8% of such women who were not going back. The significance of this difference should perhaps be viewed with a degree of scepticism however given a tendency to seek justification for the decision already made. If non-returners could reinforce the non-essential nature of their earnings by indicating that partners had also regarded them as "just" for extras then it may seem natural for them to do so.

In this study it has proved possible to demonstrate a statistically significant relationship between her partner's attitude to her job and the likelihood of a woman returning to employment following maternity leave. It does need to be reiterated however that caution is necessary in interpreting the findings. These were "second-hand" accounts; they were

women's perceptions of their partners views which may have differed subtly in some cases from the views which men themselves would have expressed.

The large majority of women in this study, some 94.5% of returners claimed that their partner's attitude had not influenced their decision. It is apparent that women generally regarded the employment decision as their decision and their personal responsibility, albeit that most had discussed it with their partner. The attitudes which women themselves had to their work, their so-called employment orientations, may be assumed then to have been of more significance for the decision they were required to make regarding a return to employment following maternity leave.

Employment Orientations - the Meaning of Work

An objective of the present study was to explore the meanings which women attributed to work; what it meant to them as individuals, and whether it held a different meaning for them now in the context of motherhood.

The literature in this area (eg Brown 1986) suggests that as individuals both men and women develop particular employment orientations, which in turn are reflected in their definitions of self-identity. Two concepts are particularly important; occupational identity and employment orientations. Occupational identity, it has been argued, is central to social identity - "the activities [individuals] engage in during the course of their employment are socially recognised, valued, evaluated and rewarded, and those evaluations and rewards in our sort of society, constitute an important, perhaps still the most important, element in overall social identity" (Brown 1986 p.2). Like occupational

identity the notion of employment orientation has been developed by researchers largely in the study of male workers. It has been defined as the meaning which [men] give to work and ...the place and function they accord to work within their lives as a whole". (Goldthorpe et al 1968 p.9). A number of studies (eg Dex 1988) have established that women, just as much as men, may differ in the meanings which they give to work and in the place it occupies in their lives as a whole.

One of the propositions put forward in Chapter I of this study was that the likelihood of a woman returning to work following maternity leave would be influenced by the meaning which work held for her and by the place and function she had accorded to work in her life as a whole.

As discussed in Chapter I, a central feature of the employment orientations approach is the distinction it draws between instrumental and expressive orientations, and the links that are made between employment and other aspects of workers lives. For the instrumental worker the primary meaning of work is as a means to an end - the end being external to the work situation. In so far as the instrumental worker seeks extrinsic rewards from employment these are seen to be located outside the workplace primarily in the privatised world of family life. For the "expressive" worker, by contrast, rewards are related to gaining satisfaction with the job itself and/or aspects of the workplace environment. (For a fuller discussion of employment orientations see Chapter I p.49-55).

This study sought to establish whether the likelihood of a return to employment varied according to whether the women in the sample displayed an instrumental or expressive orientation, and whether they saw their social identity in terms of their occupation or as

a wife or mother. It was proposed that *"women who see their employment as the source of their identity, for whom the work itself is intrinsically satisfying (ie expressive workers) are more likely to continue in employment than those who have a purely instrumental view of work"*.

In order to establish what meaning work had held for women, and what place it had had in their lives, prior to going on maternity leave, they were asked to rate on a scale of 1-7 their main reasons for working, based on a series of seven statements or items.

In the analysis of these items two were rated more highly than all others. These were "I worked to pay for extras" and "I worked because I enjoyed the work itself". The former might reasonably be considered to be indicative of an instrumental orientation, the latter of an expressive orientation.

Overall 46.5% of the sample rated "to pay for extras" most highly (ie 1st or 2nd) and a further 31.2% considered it of "medium" importance (ie 3rd or 4th). Just over 30.0% considered their main reason for working had been because they "enjoyed the work itself" and a further 40.1% considered it of medium importance.

The primary interest was to establish whether those who said they worked because they enjoyed the work itself, ie those who had an expressive orientation, would be significantly more likely to intend to return to work than those who said they worked to pay for extras and hence might be said to have an instrumental orientation.

Table 5.24 - Orientation to Work by Employment Decision		
<i>Attitude/Reason for Working</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Mainly Instrumental	48.7	51.3
Mainly Expressive	84.6	15.4

Chi-Square
21.85792

DF
7

Level of Significance
0.01

Table 5.24 above suggests that some differences did exist between those identified as mainly expressive or as mainly instrumental workers. Nearly 85.0% of those who had given a high or medium rating to an expressive indicator, ie "enjoyed the work itself" intended to return, compared to just 48.7% of those had given a high or medium rating to an instrumental indicator ie "worked to pay for extras".

Chi-square tests carried out on the data supported these findings and revealed that there were statistically significant differences at the .01% level in the likelihood of those with an expressive orientation returning to work compared to those with an instrumental orientation.

A number of points need to be considered in interpreting the findings above as a seemingly clear cut endorsement of the proposition that "women for whom the work is intrinsically satisfying (ie expressive workers) are more likely to continue in employment than those who have a purely instrumental view of work" Firstly, as Dex (1988) and others have indicated, the two orientations are not mutually exclusive. In this study, indeed, nearly 10.0% of non-returners and nearly 18.0% of returners rated both instrumental and expressive factors in the "most important" category as their reasons for working. Using a more sensitive typology Dex also found that the majority of working

women had either a "personal instrumental" or a "social instrumental" orientation to work. That is, that whilst they did work "for the money", they gave priority to work as a means of achieving personal development goals or as a way of achieving the reward of emotionally satisfying relationships. The "personal-instrumental" orientation was also evident amongst the returners in this study who, although they were more likely to have an expressive orientation than their non-returning counterparts (35.6% compared to 16.1%) were just as likely to also have an instrumental orientation. This was evident in 36.3% of returners.

This is a complex area of investigation. The present study does suggest a greater difference between returners and non-returners in terms of employment orientation than was found by Brannen and Moss (1991) for example. It also supports however their earlier finding that "occupational status" is the main determining factor in employment orientation.

The findings also perhaps provide a degree of support for the Hakim (1995) thesis that two "qualitatively" different groups of women may coexist with the labour force. (See Chapter 1, p.37)

Table 5.25 - Orientation to Work by Occupation				
<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Occupation</i>			
	<i>Mgr/Prof</i>	<i>Assoc Prof</i>	<i>Cler & Related</i>	<i>Anc & Supp Serv</i>
Instrumental	-	21.3	44.7	34.0
Expressive	13.0	65.5	14.7	6.5

Table 5.25 above suggests that in this study women in clerical and in ancillary occupations were significantly more likely to have an instrumental orientation to work

than were women in professional or managerial occupations. Nearly half (44.7%) of those indicating that the main reason for working had been "to pay for extras" worked in clerical jobs and 34.0% in ancillary grades, but this was not rated highly by any of the 18 women in managerial or professional occupations. Table 5.25 shows that 13.0% of those with an expressive orientation were managers and professionals, 65.5% were associate professionals, but only 6.5% worked in ancillary grades. There proved to be a statistically significant difference between the proportions of those of higher and lower occupational status likely to display an expressive or instrumental orientation to employment. This is not to suggest that few of the women employed in ancillary and support services enjoyed their work. Many clearly did and this was evidenced by the comments of those, in particular in support services with direct patient contact, who said that they got a lot of satisfaction from helping patients and working as part of the care team. But this was not generally their main reason for working. Most of these women did work "for the money" although a number did appear to have a more "social-instrumental" approach whereas those in the more "high status" jobs were more likely to emphasise the intrinsic rewards of their work.

These findings in themselves however provide no convincing solution to the conundrum of whether it is the intrinsic rewards associated with their employment and their expressive orientation which encourages women in high status occupations to go back to work, or whether it is the higher "instrumental" rewards in terms of earnings and earnings potential that is the truly significant factor. Almost certainly both do serve as motivators; employment orientations do not appear to be mutually exclusive. It must be acknowledged also that women's past experiences of work may be just as important as attitude or orientation in determining whether or not to continue in employment. Past

experiences may indeed have given rise to a particular attitude or orientation. Low status jobs often provide lower rewards, both instrumental and expressive, than high status jobs, it is thus perhaps to be expected that women will be less attached to them. If a woman's job has been routine, low-skilled, or has had poor environmental conditions attached to it, as might be said to be the case with some of the work undertaken by ancillary workers in the NHS, then it may not, in itself, be intrinsically attractive. That lack of intrinsic attraction may be the origin from which a non-expressive orientation is derived, rather than some "given" attitude, somehow internal to the woman herself, arising from her deeply held beliefs or ideologies regarding employment.

There is some evidence available (Fogarty, Rapoport and Rapoport 1971) that married women with children have less expressive orientations to work and lower career aspirations than their single and/or childless counterparts. In order to establish whether motherhood had changed attitudes to employment and the direction of the change, if any, women were asked whether their attitudes had changed, and if so, whether work was now more or less important to them.

The majority (71.3%) of women said that their attitude towards work had changed since they had the baby. Of these 89.6% said that work was now less important to them.

Table 5.26 - Attitude Change by Employment Decision		
<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-Return %</i>
Job Less Important	62.0	38.0
Job More Important	100.0	-
Job Just as Important	88.1	11.9

Table 5.26 above shows that although those who felt their job was now less important than before were less likely to return than those who felt their job to be just as important attitudes to the job had changed amongst even the majority of returners. The responses, as quantified in Table 5.26 do not, however, tell the whole story. A number of women added comments to their response to elaborate on what they meant by "less important" in particular. Some respondents explained what they meant by their change in attitude saying for example, "The main thing I expect to get from my job now is the money - before I would have said the social aspect, being out among other people, but I could do without that now", others said "its just that having a child has made me realise that there is something more to life than work". A doctor who had had her first child at forty-one said "my attitude to my work has changed - I don't know if I really mean that it is less important - it's just that I'm now able to put it into some kind of perspective".

Having stated that work was now less important a number were quick to add "I wouldn't want my boss to know that though". As one woman put it "I suppose what I've just said sort of confirms what most employers think - that once you've had a child you're not really interested, only half your mind is on the job, or you're just there for the money - that's why women won't get on in their careers". Some of those who said their work was now less important stressed in their comments that they would not be giving it any less effort, they were still committed to their job, but as one woman put it "I'll not act any differently I suppose, but I do feel different, in my own mind".

Just over 7.0% of the sample said that work had become more important to them since they had the baby. Almost all of these, fifteen, women felt a need to go further, to explain what they perceived as a somewhat "deviant" attitude. One said "I know your

work isn't supposed to be that important to you when you have a child to think of". The explanations given for this, unusual attitude, ranged from a desire to provide the child with all the good things in life - "it was different when I was just working for myself ...I had a take it or leave it attitude ...now I know my job is really important so that I'll be able to give him things I never had", to an appreciation of the structure which being employed brings to everyday life - "if anything my job is more important now ...it will help me to organise my life and get more out of the time that I have". The attitude most frequently expressed by those who now saw their job as more important was however summed up in the following comment from a medical laboratory scientist who said "being at home has made me realise that I need a bit more challenge in my life ...I think I'll probably go mad if I didn't have something more to think about than nappies and housework". All of these women were at pains to emphasise the central importance of the child in their life, but wanted to explain that their job was important too.

While the vast majority of women had changed their attitude to paid employment since becoming a mother, the responses, that the job was now "less important", or was "more important", conceal a wealth of different nuances and reservations. Even a number of those who said that their job was "just as important as before" went on to say that it had never been the biggest thing in their life anyhow, it was "just a job". This was one aspect of the study for which the qualitative analysis of comments made was more telling than the quantifiable responses.

The relationship between attitudes, ideologies, beliefs and behaviour is complex. It is an interactive system in which they exert a reciprocal influence upon one another. At an intuitive level it seems reasonable to assume that prevailing and dominant ideologies

regarding motherhood and employment will influence a woman's attitude towards "working mothers" and towards her own "dual roles", and may well shape her employment orientation. It seems reasonable to assume also that that same attitude and orientation, as well as her partner's attitude to her various roles, will be significant in influencing her decisions regarding employment following maternity leave. A degree of caution is necessary however in interpreting responses on issues such as ideologies and attitudes. Firstly because it is not possible to separate out completely attitudes to one role or function from attitudes to another in any meaningful way. The meaning which work holds for an individual will be related to how she feels about working mothers in general, but the reverse also applies, and will be influenced by the significance which she attaches to dominant ideologies and the social context in constructing that meaning. The women constructing such meanings and making such decisions are after all, creative actors and not merely the passive recipients of imposed attitudes and ideologies.

Caution is also needed in interpreting responses in this area because it seems possible that some women will have constructed their replies about the past, for example in relation to "reasons" for working, in the light of the present. They will have given their reasons from the vantage point of their new status as mothers and having made their decisions about returning to work. Hence it is not completely certain that their employment orientation before maternity leave was precisely that described at the point of interview. In interpreting responses regarding partners' attitudes and support, the main reservations concern the fact that these were "second-hand" mediated by the woman's perception of her partner's view, and that perception will in itself be influenced by ideologies regarding the nature of marriage and beliefs about sharing and solidarity within partnerships.

Whatever the difficulties of interpretation and the complexity of the issues, it is nonetheless clear that attitudes, ideologies and beliefs do have an important role to play. Not only do they directly influence women's decisions, but they are reflected also in other factors which may have their own significant role to play in the decision-making process. The degree of sharing which is enjoyed within households, in terms of both resources and burdens, will be influenced, for example, by beliefs concerning the role of household members and by perceptions regarding the significance of each individual's contribution to the household. The shaping of such factors may well in turn influence women's employment decisions.

It is not only the attitudes of individuals however, and the meanings which they themselves construct for their situation, or the attitudes and beliefs held within a household which may influence a woman's employment decisions following maternity leave. It was observed in the introduction that such decisions may be seen as the outcome of the interaction between an individual's attitudes, the attitudes of their partner and the wider society, the choice-set which is available to each individual and the opportunity structures and constraints with which she is faced. That choice set, and the opportunity structures and constraints, will be shaped in part by the social context in which the decisions are being made and by the attitudes and ideologies of the wider society of which the woman and her family are a part.

Attitudes do influence behaviours and behaviours do influence attitudes, for society as a whole and for employers, as much as for individuals. In Chapter I it was claimed that the attitudes of the wider society are significant, in that a culture and society which assumes and supports the fact that mothers will continue in employment is much more

likely to provide the wherewithal to enable and facilitate that employment than a culture in which the working mother has been defined as "the source of social problems". The attitudes of employers, which are in turn influenced by those of the wider society, and of society itself, are also significant in influencing structural opportunities and constraints. It is to working conditions, employment practices and availability of childcare - factors which may facilitate, or may inhibit, a decision to return to work - that we now turn.

STRUCTURAL FACTORS

Employment Practices

The women in this study were well aware of the importance of employers' "attitudes" for their decision to return to work.

About half of the respondents made comments, and just over half suggested changes, in response to the open-ended questions at the end of the interview. The most common theme of these was that obstacles to women's continuing employment were symptomatic of attitudes towards working mothers. They commented upon the great gulf between the myth, as they saw it, of equality of opportunity in the health services, as depicted by projects such as Opportunity 2000, and the reality of their own situations. Many felt that although "family-friendly" employment practices were, in theory, in place, in practice they were discouraged at local level and available only to very limited grades and occupations.

Studies such as those undertaken by the Policy Studies Institute (McRae 1991) and for Equal Opportunities Review (1995), show a very definite linkage between the availability

of family-friendly practices and the likelihood of women returning to work following maternity leave. The latter study, for example, found that "access to reduced or flexible working hours is a major factor in determining whether a woman will return to work following maternity leave" and that "the greater the number of benefits offered the more likely it is that a woman will return to work following her maternity leave. Nine out of ten women employed by an organisation which offers between 5 and 7 benefits return to work. This decreases gradually as the number of benefits reduces" (P.17).

From this it seemed reasonable to hypothesise that *"A woman is more likely to return to work if her employer offers family-friendly facilities, such as reduced or flexible working hours, job sharing, parental leave, re-entry and retainer schemes"*. Hence the study set out to test the strength of the relationship between the availability of such facilities and the likelihood of a return to work following maternity leave.

Questions regarding the provision of workplace creche facilities were included at the request of health service management. Although creche or day care nursery facilities were not currently available at any of the hospitals or units involved in the study the employers were keen to establish whether there would be any interest in the provision of such facilities, how they might be funded, and how much individual employees would be prepared to pay for use of such a facility.

In response to these questions 57.9% of women said that they would use a workplace creche which was either free or available at a subsidised cost. Just over 23.0% of women said they would be prepared to pay the "market rate" for a workplace creche, several commenting that the expense would be worthwhile for the convenience of having

such a facility.

The trusts and units taking part in the study did claim to have policies on:

- flexible working
- job-sharing
- part-time working
- parental leave

Which were said to apply to all occupational groups "so far as reasonably practicable".

Hence women were asked about the availability of these as it had applied to the job in which they had worked prior to going on maternity leave. Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9 below show the responses to each of these questions.

Figure 6: Work Flexibility

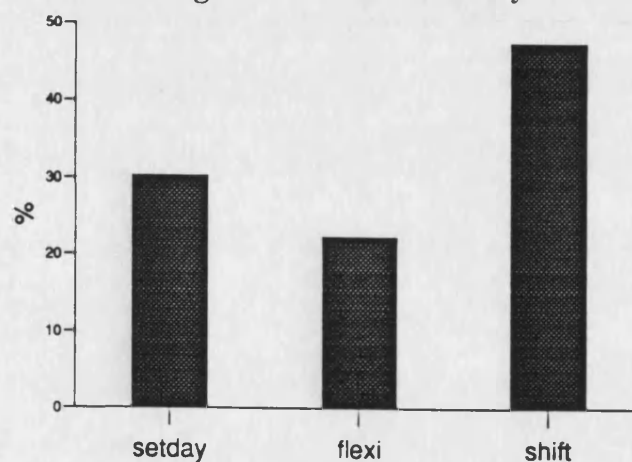


Figure 7: Availability of Job Share

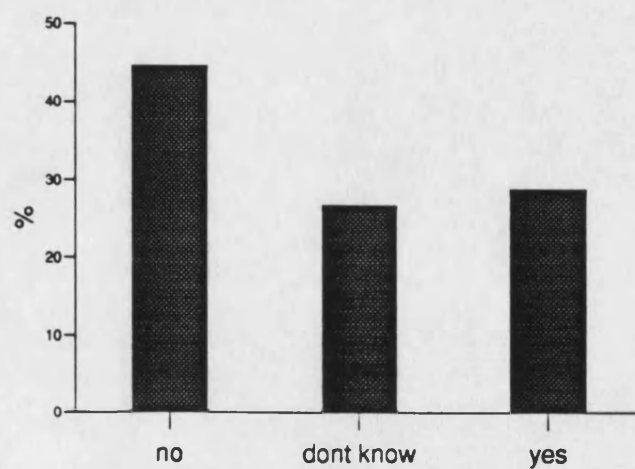


Figure 8: Availability of Part-time Work

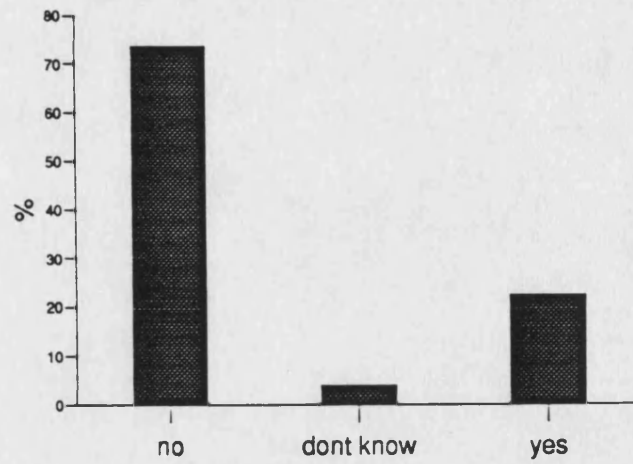
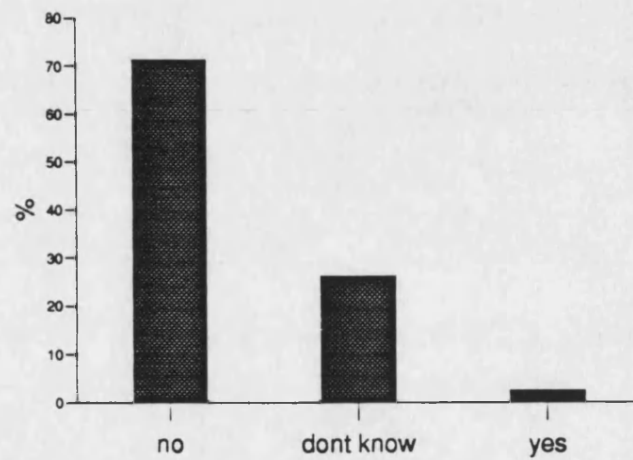


Figure 9: Availability of Parental Leave



In response to the question on flexible hours, 22.3% of respondents said that in their job, at their grade, they would be allowed to choose the time to start and finish work. Most

said in response to this question however that they worked shifts (47.5%).

This response no doubt reflected the organisation of work within the nursing profession which dominated the occupational distribution of the sample.

Despite their employers' apparent commitment to job-sharing, wherever practicable or feasible, 44.7% of respondents said that this facility would not be available to their type of job or at their grade. A number of women elaborated on their response with comments such as "I couldn't see it working in my kind of job" (ward sister) or "I would never be able to find a partner in my speciality, at my level" (medical consultant) and "my manager wouldn't be bothered with all the hassle involved" (radiographer). A somewhat disconcerting 26.7% of respondents did not know whether job-sharing would be available to them, and a number of those commented that they had never heard of such a scheme.

These findings are, however, consistent with those of other studies such as the Institute of Manpower Studies (IMS) report on Retaining Women Employees (Metcalf, 1990) and the PSI study on Maternity Rights (McRae, 1991). McRae, for example found that employers were far more likely than their employees to say that three types of family-friendly or flexible employment practice were available - part-time, flexible hours and job-sharing. For example, 33.0% of employers in her study said that job-sharing was available, compared to 6.0% of mothers. McRae suggests two reasons for this apparent discrepancy, over and above a tendency for managers to overstate benefits and employees to understate them, which seem equally likely to apply in the present case. Firstly she suggests that some women just may not be aware of what is available. The second

reason concerns access: "women may have answered in terms of whether the arrangement was available to any women employee. (This) suggests there are wide differences in the availability of different types of arrangements for different categories of women within the same workforce" (P.54). Metcalf (1990) similarly suggests that low take-up of family-friendly practices in the IMS study, was due to employees often only being able to work flexibly at management's discretion.

Nearly three-quarters of the sample (73.8%) said that part-time working would not be available to them beyond the initial period of return when they could work reduced hours for three months. This was a somewhat surprising finding since the nursing profession, in particular, has had a long tradition of part-time working. Amongst "women returners", however, of the 27 women going back to work on a part-time basis 78.0% were nurses. Many women added to their response on this item by expressing a wish that part-time work could be made available, by commenting on its alleged availability in the private sector, and by claiming that it was management "policy" to move away from part-time working, which was held to inhibit cost effectiveness and continuity of care.² A number added that the availability of part-time work, which fitted in with family responsibilities, had once been one of the great attractions, bringing women into nursing and encouraging them to remain in continuous employment. A substantial proportion of the sample (37.1%) did however admit that whatever the attractions of part-time working, neither it nor job-sharing would be feasible for them personally because of the financial implications.

There may well have been some confusion, despite the best efforts of interviewers, as to

² Whilst this was not declared as a formal policy by management it was stated that all work practices including part-time working and skill mixes were under scrutiny in order to improve effectiveness.

what was meant by a "parental leave" scheme. Five respondents did say that their employer offered such a scheme whilst the vast majority either did not know (26.2%) or claimed that no such scheme was available. Again this was a question which gave rise to much additional and often emotional comments. Some claimed that they knew of cases of mothers forced to "go on the sick" themselves in order to be with a sick child in hospital, or having to take unpaid leave to cope with a childminding crisis. The health service was viewed as a largely uncaring and non family-friendly employer by some of these women.

The EOR (1995) survey claimed that women were more likely to return to work following maternity leave where practices such as those outlined above were available to them. It was important therefore, for the purposes of the present study, to know whether those intending to return to work were more likely than those not returning to have access to such family-friendly employment practices and also whether the availability of such facilities would have made any difference to the decisions of those not intending to return.

Just over 22.0% of the sample said that they would have been allowed to work flexible hours in their job and at their grade.

Table 5.27 - Work Flexibility by Employment Decision		
<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-return %</i>
Set Day	67.2	32.8
Shift	76.1	23.9
Flexi Hours	71.1	28.9

Chi-Square
1.49021

DF
2

Level of Significance
> 0.20

Table 5.27 shows little difference in the likelihood of return between those working shifts, a set day or flexible hours. There is little difference too in terms of the availability of flexible working to returners and non-returners. Just under 22.0% of those intending to return could have worked flexible hours compared to 23.2% of those not intending to return. Chi-square tests carried out on the data supported the conclusion that the availability of flexible working was not related to the likelihood of a return to work following maternity leave at a statistically significant level. In interpreting such findings it is worth bearing in mind however the nature of most of the occupations in this particular sample. Most had a direct patient care focus which, whether rightly or wrongly, led managers to believe that flexibility, allowing staff to choose starting and finishing times within a designated band, was not feasible if continuity of care was to be ensured. Hence flexible working was only available to a minority of the sample and, of these, more than 90.0% were in clerical and related occupations.

As with flexible working, job-share arrangements were available to only a minority, 28.7%, of the sample, although a substantial group (26.7%) did not know if job-sharing was an option - perhaps suggesting a lack of enthusiasm in the promotion of such practices by management.

Table 5.28 Work Pattern by Employment Decision		
<i>Work Pattern</i>	<i>Return %</i>	<i>Non-return %</i>
Part-time permitted	77.7	22.3
Part-time not permitted	69.8	30.2
Job-share permitted	82.8	17.2
Job-share not permitted	65.5	34.4

	<u>Chi-Square</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>Level of Significance</u>
(Part-time)	2.06153	2	> 0.20
(Job-Share)	5.20945	2	0.10

Table 5.28 shows that those to whom job-sharing was available were rather more likely than others to intend to return to work. The data also showed that whilst job-sharing had been available to 32.9% of those intending to return, only 17.9% of non returners had enjoyed this facility.

However the differences between the two groups were only statistically significant at the .10% level and it should be noted that no returners in fact intended to take up the job-sharing option. The significance of this facility for the likelihood of continuing in employment is not then of very great import. There is a contrast between the emphasis given to facilities such as job-sharing in "official" NHS policy, and the lack of awareness on the ground regarding such alternative work patterns, and a seeming lack of a mechanism such as a job-share register which might have facilitated the practice.

Just over 22.0% of women said that they would be allowed to work part-time in their job at their grade. Again Table 5.28 shows that those to whom part-time work was available were rather more likely to return to work; 77.7% intended to return compared to 69.8% of those who did not have this facility. Nearly one quarter of returners said they could have worked part-time compared to 17.9% of those not intending to return. But again chi-square tests on the data revealed that the differences between the two groups are not statistically significant. Again, perhaps the real significance lies not in the difference between the two groups but in the lack of part-time working generally. A substantial proportion of the sample, some 37.1%, said that job-sharing or part-time working would not have been a viable option for them in financial terms. Nonetheless of the 35 returners who said that they would be permitted to work part-time in their job at their grade the majority, 27 women or 77.0% of this group, intended to make use of this

facility and were going back to work on a part-time basis. This fact, and the qualitative analysis of the comments and suggestions made by women during the interviews - in which the single most common plea was for more part-time work to be made available - suggests that many more women would have preferred to return to part-time work. A number of respondents also commented that, although they were "happy enough" to go back to full-time work at present, they were concerned about the future. They expressed anxieties that, for example, childcare arrangements would not work out as planned. More especially, if they had a second child, or when their child started school, they saw a need to obtain part-time work and because of that, possibly being forced to leave their job in the health service. Nearly one third (31.1%) of those who said that they would be allowed to work part-time added that it would only be permitted at a basic grade. Since the majority of these women were currently employed on the basic grade this was reasonably acceptable to them. Others however, who included two medical secretaries, a ward sister, a doctor and a laboratory scientist said that they would not be prepared to "drop a grade or grades" in order to get part-time work, at least not at the present time. Two women commented that part-time work at the basic grade for their occupation would not, in any case, be a financially viable solution. This requirement to give up their hard-earned occupational status in order to get more suitable working hours seemed to be particularly resented. It may well be, however, that a number of these women will have to accept "downgrading" at some time in the future in order to retain employment. Brannen and Moss (1991) for example, found that in the early years after having a first child women's occupational mobility may be affected in two ways. Over a three year period of study they found that one quarter of the mothers in their sample were to be located in jobs that were lower status than their jobs before childbirth. A third of this downward mobility was within the same occupation and was often associated with

reduced hours of working. A number of women complained that employers and/or management "have you every way" or "they allow you to work part-time if you want to and it sounds very good, very accommodating. Then they say, but not at your level of course and so they make it impossible for you". As one medical secretary on a GAA (General Administrative Assistant) grade put it "it looks as though you are being given the choice, but there is no real choice". Discussions with representatives of management, prior to commencement of the study, had indicated that family-friendly facilities, including reduced hours, flexible working and job-sharing, were available "wherever practical and feasible in meeting the needs of the service", (Human Resources Manager). A parental leave scheme was being introduced as was a more formal career break scheme with retainer and re-entry elements. The attitude of management was very much one of encouraging women to continue in employment whilst ensuring the efficient, effective and economic provision of a service to patients.

In practice however it seemed that family-friendly facilities were not universally available to all occupations and at all grades. In some instances it may have been entirely reasonable that certain facilities could not practicably be made available; for example, flexible working hours might prove impractical in areas of nursing. In other cases, however, it seemed that availability was largely subject to the preference or whims of individual managers or heads of department, some of whom may not feel that, job-sharing for example, would be conducive to the smooth running of their department, or who may feel that, the management costs entailed outweighed the benefits, in such a scheme. This lack of availability, in practice, of facilities such as flexible hours, job-sharing and part-time working suggests that, although the policy is to encourage women with young children to continue in employment, the culture within the NHS, perhaps

reflecting that of the wider society, has not really changed. The tensions experienced in implementing "family-friendly" employment measures have been noted in other studies. Cockburn (1991) for example, observed that "The issue of maternity provision highlights a tension between men at the top of the hierarchy, particularly those senior personnel managers with responsibility for labour market strategies and human resource management and line managers, down the line. The former, with the organisation's overall competitiveness in mind, are identifying the special value of domestically defined women employees and adapting personnel policy to make better use of them. The hapless line managers have to deal with the contradictions Annoyance with the managerial implications of maternity leave and related provisions such as special leave, part-timing and job-sharing seems to be widespread" (pp.92-94) In this context we do well to recall the findings of an earlier study of women in the NHS (Davies and Rosser 1986), that women were disadvantaged not by particular employment policies but by practices that developed in a hostile environment.

Given the strength of feeling expressed regarding the need for part-time work in particular, it might be supposed that the availability of this, or an alternative such as job-sharing, might have had some influence upon, or perhaps the potential to reverse, the decision made by those not intending to return. In fact, non-returners were more evenly split on this than might have been anticipated. Some 42.9% of those not intending to return did say that the availability of such "family-friendly" employment practices would have affected their decision. On the other hand 57.4% of non-returners said that this would not have made any difference for them.

Despite such findings, however, the significance of practices and facilities for mothers'

employment decisions should not be dismissed. These women had already made their decisions, and in the case of non-returners had "justified" the decision to leave the labour market on a number of grounds. They may have felt that to admit to the possibility of reversal would have in some way, undermined the integrity of that decision.

Many women, both returners and non-returners commented that they had had to "do their sums" to calculate whether it would be worthwhile in financial terms to return to work, given the costs of the dual-earner lifestyle, such as childcare and transport, for which most women saw themselves as personally responsible.

Again the majority of non-returners, 75.0%, worked in either ancillary and support services or clerical occupations. In such occupations the idea of "career progression" and high future earnings potential was less common. Hence the type of calculations described by a number of returners, in which low-earnings at present were weighed against future promotion and earnings potential, did not apply to the majority of non-returners.

The complexity of women's employment decisions following maternity leave has been acknowledged throughout, and indeed provides the true *raison d'être* for this study. Nowhere is that complexity better illustrated than in considering the strength of the relationship between family-friendly employment practices and the likelihood of a return to work following maternity leave. Whilst women do seem to have been marginally more likely to return where such practices were available to them, this cannot be regarded as "the reason" why women went back. Nor, in particular, can it be claimed that the reason why 27.2% of the sample did not intend to return was because of a lack of such facilities.

The interrelationship and overlap between a factor such as employment practices and others, such as earnings potential, household relationships, attitudes and ideologies concerning motherhood and employment may illustrate the complexities involved. What is required however is an understanding of the nature of such inter-relationships, and of the combination of factors most likely to produce a particular employment decision on whether or not to return to work following maternity leave. The analysis which is discussed in Chapter 6 seeks to provide such an understanding.

Childcare

If the availability of family-friendly employment practices may be said to reflect the attitudes of the wider society towards maternal employment then the provision of childcare facilities is surely an even more accurate barometer of the social context.

The proposition that "*a woman is more likely to return to work if childcare facilities are readily available*" resulted from the findings of a number of studies discussed in Chapter I (eg McRae 1991, Kremer and Montgomery 1993, Ward 1994). These suggested that the majority of mothers not in employment would seek work if affordable childcare facilities were available; that most mothers regarded improved childcare facilities as necessary to their return to work, and that lack of affordable childcare was a severe constraint on the scope for paid employment, of especially. low-earning women. The validity of the proposition was reinforced by the EOR (1995) survey on employers' provision of childcare packages which showed that such facilities were of significance in influencing a return to work following maternity leave. Evidence in support of the relationship between childcare facilities and women's labour market participation came

also from comparative studies (eg Moss (1988) on France; Leira (1993) and Jonung and Persson (1993) on Sweden) with other European countries. These studies suggest that the differences in women's labour market participation, in particular in full-time employment, between Britain and other European states may be due to differences in the availability, and funding, of childcare facilities.

Of all the theories of why mothers do, or do not, continue in employment, the "lack of childcare" thesis is probably second only to the "for the money" thesis as the most common "explanation" of labour market participation. In Northern Ireland levels of publicly funded childcare are the lowest in the entire European Union hence this may well be considered a factor of some significance for the employment decisions of women in the current study.

In order to test the strength of the relationship between availability of childcare and the likelihood of a return to employment following maternity leave, women were asked a number of questions relating to, the type of care arranged; responsibility for arranging and financing childcare; costs of care, and whether they themselves saw childcare as an issue of significance for the employment decision that they had made.

Figure 10: Intended Childcare Arrangements

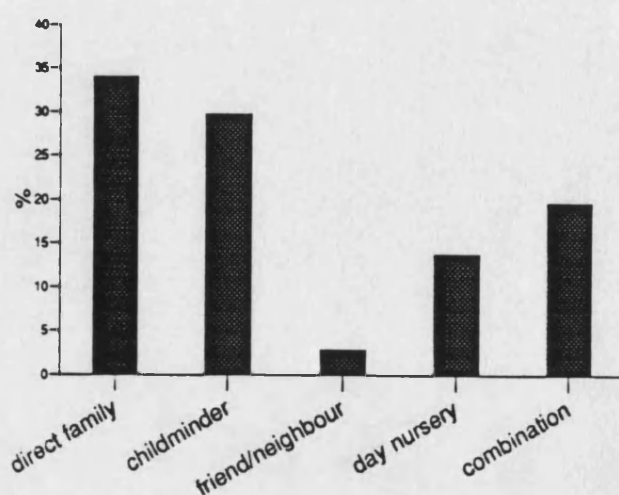


Figure 10 shows that in this study, as in Northern Ireland in general, (McLaughlin, 1993) relatives, in particular mothers and mothers-in-law, were the greatest childcare resource, providing care in 34% of cases. The women intending to use this family care (which is perhaps one of the more beneficial spin-offs of Northern Ireland's traditional society), were quick to acknowledge how "lucky" they were to have a relative, usually a mother, prepared to take on the task. Several of those interviewed claimed that, leaving the child with their own mother meant they would have no worries. It was "as good as" being with the child themselves. Of the large proportion of returners (19.6%) who said that they would be using a combination of childcare arrangements, the majority named a relative, husband, mother (in-law), sister, etc. as one or more parts of that combination.

More than a quarter of returners (29.7%) planned to use the service of a childminder, usually at a childminders home. A number claimed to have made this choice, in preference to, for example, a day nursery, because they felt that the child would get more "one-to-one" care than in a group setting. Again a number of those planning a combination of care said that they would use a childminder in combination with care usually to be provided by their partner on certain days or nights of the week depending upon shifts etc.

The fact that more than 10.0% of mothers planned to use a private day nursery reflects the growth of the private day care sector in Northern Ireland over recent years. The slightly greater usage of that type of facility by women in this sample, than amongst women in general in Northern Ireland (Turner, 1993), perhaps reflects the somewhat higher earning levels of these women and the greater likelihood of them being in full-time employment. The anticipated costs of childcare were related to earnings levels, with only

those in the upper middle and high earning categories anticipating the charges of over £70 per week likely to be associated with private day care facilities. The significance of the relationship between childcare costs and earnings levels was revealed by chi-square tests carried out on the data to be at the 0.001 % level.

The responses to the question on childcare arrangements made it very clear that women saw themselves as personally, and in some cases solely, responsible for ensuring that their child was cared for. It was their "choice" to return to work which made it necessary to seek substitute care, therefore it was their responsibility not only to seek out, make and monitor childcare arrangements, for which well over half, 59.6%, of returners saw themselves as responsible, but, even more so, for financing childcare. Over 65.0% of returners said childcare costs would be financed from their own earnings. Several women commented that although they had a joint account and the payment for childcare would be from that account, nonetheless they felt that their earnings would be primarily used to pay for it.

Having good quality childcare in place clearly was a factor of some significance, and of some concern, for those intending to return to work. It is not seen by most to have greatly influenced their decision to return to work, coming well behind for example, the need for money, for both essentials and extras; the personal satisfaction and sense of identity gained from work; and career reasons. It was, by contrast however, the factor which most women, by far said would have reversed their decision to return. More than 84.0% of returners said that they would not, or could not, have made the decision to continue in employment following maternity leave, if they had not had available satisfactory and affordable childcare. To this quantifiable response must be added the

comments which women volunteered on this issue. Most saw it as a serious matter. Even those who said that it had always been "taken for granted" that their mother, or mother-in-law, would take care of the child expressed some concerns that it might be "too much for her". Many women made comments which suggested reservations or a lack of confidence in the arrangements which was not apparent from the quantifiable response. Brannen and Moss (1988) however, suggest that the inadequacies of provision and the low level of public debate about the issues may have lowered mothers' expectations of childcare in two ways.

"They are less likely to be informed about childcare services and issues; and they will be aware that alternatives are relatively few and that better places will not be readily available. Add to this the women's doubt and guilt feelings about going back to work and 'leaving' their children and you have a recipe for women putting up with the limited childcare available and not taking too critical a look at the actual arrangements. ...Scrutiny may only produce still further anxiety and guilt with few possibilities of better arrangements." (p.108)

The vast majority of returners (94.5%) had, by the time of interview, made definite arrangements for childcare. Many still commented, however, that they would "have to see how things work out". Throughout the comments of those intending to return there were echoes of the "culture of impermanence" referred to earlier, in which women could not really, totally commit themselves to a permanent or long term return to work because of what might be the outcome from events beyond their control.

The primary interest in this study was of course to establish whether the availability of childcare was a significant factor in determining the likelihood of a woman continuing in employment.

Returners clearly did feel that it had been significant, but then by the time of interview they had made their decision to return to work, and some may have felt a need to "justify" that decision by making it clear that they had acted responsibly. Whilst not claiming that having satisfactory and affordable childcare had been the main factor prompting their return, they made clear that they were responsible mothers, for whom care for their child was of prime importance, by stating that a lack of satisfactory childcare would have been the factor with the greatest potential for reversing their decision to return.

But what of those not intending to return? How significant had childcare, or the lack of it, been for their decisions not to continue in employment?

Table 5.29 - Significance of lack of Childcare for Non-Return	
<i>Level of Significance</i>	<i>%</i>
Most Important Factor	7.1
Significant Factor	23.2
Influenced Slightly	51.8
No Significance	17.9

	100.0

Table 5.29 shows that more than 80.0% of those not intending to return indicated that availability of childcare had influenced their decision to some extent. The majority however, 51.8% of non-returners, said that it had only slightly influenced the decision. Overall, the lack of satisfactory and affordable childcare was a poor third in the reasons given by women for their decision not to return. It came well behind the "other" reasons, usually related to a belief in, or attitude to, bringing up the child themselves, and less important than the fact that they claimed not to need the money for essentials.

Similarly, the non-returners did not feel that availability of childcare would have had the potential to reverse their decision that, for example, financial factors, such as, needing money for essentials, insecurity of partner's job, or greater earnings potential, would have had. The majority of these women (57.1%) also said that even the provision of a workplace creche or nursery would not have altered their decision not to return to work.

Thus, at first sight it would appear that availability of childcare was a more important factor in the decision of returners than of non-returners. In a number of ways, however, the "availability of childcare" explanation is as inadequate to explaining a decision to return to work following maternity leave as is the "going back for the money" explanation. Availability of suitable and affordable childcare is clearly a necessary condition of return, but it alone cannot be regarded as a sufficient reason. Such a conclusion would be consistent with quite recent research from the USA which suggests that while childcare costs have a significant negative effect on women's labour force participation the magnitude of the effect is much smaller than might have been expected. Universal no cost childcare is estimated to increase women's labour force participation rates by just ten percentage points (Connelly, 1991).

Whilst not wishing to go as far as Hakim (1995) in claiming that "In effect childcare is an issue primarily for women who prefer homemaking and are secondary earners" (P.438) certainly in this study the qualitative analysis of responses in particular, would suggest that the energy and enthusiasm with which childcare is sought; the acceptability of standards and compromise, and attitudes towards cost, varied considerably from individual to individual. These varied too in relation to the other influences explored in the study, such as household income and earnings potential. A professional, for example,

with a declared household income of almost £100,000 per annum, saw day nursery charges of more than £80 per week as quite acceptable. An ancillary worker, on the other hand, who had herself taken home pay of less than £120 per week, and whose factory worker partner earned £180 per week, felt the cost of childminding, the only form of childcare available to her, to be non-feasible at less than half that amount. The acceptability of standards and compromise also varied, to some extent, in relation to income. Although women were naturally reluctant to accept less than the best for their child some did say that, for example, they would have preferred to have someone "come in" to take care of the baby at home, but it was "too expensive" compared to the care available at a childminder's premises.

Acceptability of standards varied too according to mothers' attitudes. A number claimed that only a family member could provide an adequate "substitute" for a mothers' own care. Others varied in their attitudes to childminders and to day nurseries; some seeing the latter as "baby farms" where their child would not get sufficient individual care, whilst others saw the nursery environment as more "stimulating", best for "socialising the child, getting them used to other people" and hence almost educational or at least developmental.

For those who believed that there could be no substitute for the mother-child relationship clearly no form of childcare could meet their exacting standards. In contrast, a number of women were prepared to accept what appeared to be a highly complicated and difficult combination of arrangements, involving perhaps three or four different individuals, largely, it seemed, because their partner was prepared to participate in that arrangement. Others rejected the use of any form of childcare because they felt that regardless of how

good or affordable it might be, they would still be taking on the "double burden" of motherhood and employment, without any significant level of practical support from a partner who either could not, or would not, share the responsibility for childcare. The acceptability and practicability of various forms of childcare was related too, in some cases, to the availability of family-friendly employment practices, or just to the type of work pattern available to the woman. A small number of nurses on permanent night duty, for example, felt that they could get by on a very low cost childcare combination. This was largely because their partner would be with the child for the bulk of the time, ie throughout the night, and a neighbour or relative would provide care in the few hours which these women considered necessary for their own rest. The desirability, or even feasibility, of surviving on four or five hours sleep per day seemed somewhat unrealistic. It was explained however that a full-time night duty post "only" involved four nights per week, and this made it possible - if rather tiring - in the long term. Some of the large number of women engaged in shiftwork commented upon the difficulties experienced in finding childminders who could be as flexible as their shifts demanded, with "short" weeks involving weekend work, when partners could help out and "long weeks" of up to five "split" days.

Notably absent throughout the responses is any mention of public provision for childcare. Northern Ireland has no publicly funded daycare places; here government views on the private nature of childcare and parental employment, and the primacy of market forces, working through private provision of services, are most starkly manifested. The nearest thing to public provision experienced by any of the women in this study came in the form of a "voluntary" day nursery which four returners planned to use. This was provided by a religious organisation, for a small charge and on a non-profit making basis.

Many factors clearly influenced the approaches which women adopted to finding childcare, and so it is not sufficient to conclude that some intended to return to work because they had "found" childcare whilst others would not go back because there was no satisfactory and affordable childcare to be found. A further consideration to be borne in mind in assessing the strength of the relationship between availability of childcare and the likelihood of a return to work, is the reliability of respondents accounts regarding the significance of childcare. These women had already made their employment decisions at the time of interview. Hence, as with many of the issues explored, their views may have been subject to a degree of rationalisation. It is possible that, if they had been able to find satisfactory and affordable childcare, they may well have claimed that this had been an important factor in their decision to return to work. Similarly, having found childcare they may have felt "safe enough" saying that, had it not been available they would not have decided to go back. Those not intending to return may well have been less likely to have access to satisfactory and affordable childcare. Now that the decision not to continue in employment had been made, however, they may have felt that their decision was better explained (or justified) by reference to an ideological stance which claimed that there could be no substitute for full-time motherhood. That is not to say that these respondents fabricated reasons for their non-return. By that stage they almost certainly accepted that they were not going back to work because they believed it was best to bring up the child themselves, a belief combined with the rationalisation that there was no financial necessity for them to work. This latter, despite the fact that the majority of non-returners, 58.9% had paid for the essentials of rent or mortgages, and 75% had paid for food.

The impact of post hoc rationalisation should not be underestimated. Similarly, the

interrelationship and overlap between a clearly necessary condition such as availability of childcare and factors such as income, attitudes, relationships and employment practices, demands exploration and clarification. The suggestion remains too, that a lack of childcare provision, and/or the failure to find childcare provision, may reflect the dominant ideology in both the wider society and in individual attitudes, regarding the employment of women who also have responsibility for the care of young children.

SUMMARY

The findings of the study, as shown above, serve to underline the complexity of both the issues, and the process, involved in women's employment decisions following maternity leave - for the decision-making required is a process, rather than a once-for-all, or "one-off" event.

Evidence has been presented which either supports or refutes the existence of a probabilistic relationship between each of the eight factors proposed in Chapter I, and the likelihood of a return to employment following maternity leave. Some of the factors clearly are much more significant for the employment decision than others but in presenting the findings it was considered necessary to report and devote attention to all the hypotheses tested even where the findings may be considered negative.

The evidence supports, for example, the proposition that, women with partners in insecure employment, and in particular partners who have had frequent job changes, are more likely to continue in employment, but refutes the suggestion of a relationship between partners' earnings levels and the likelihood of a woman returning to work.

The findings of the study are strongly in support of the proposition that, women in higher level occupations, with high earnings and educational qualifications, who have been employed for some time, are likely to continue in employment. There is a statistically significant relationship, in particular, between degree level education and the likelihood of a return to work following maternity leave. On the other hand there is little evidence to be found in support of the proposition that women's employment decisions are related to the way in which household finances are managed. No significant relationship was found between joint management of household finances and the likelihood of a return to work. Findings on the management of household finances did, however, raise the issue of the degree of access or personal gain for women from their own earnings - regardless of the system used for household financial management.

More evidence was available in support of the other hypothesis on household sharing. The findings suggested a statistically significant relationship between the degree to which a woman and her partner share responsibility for childcare and domestic work, and the likelihood of her continuing in employment following the birth of a child.

The meaning which work holds for women was found to be a further factor of significance for their employment decisions following maternity leave. There was evidence in support of the proposition that those with an expressive work orientation, ie. those for whom work itself was intrinsically satisfying, are more likely to continue in employment, than those who have a purely instrumental view of work. It should be noted, however, that the findings also demonstrated that the two work orientations are by no means mutually exclusive.

Overall partners' attitudes were found to be less significant than a woman's own view of her work. There was some evidence to be found in support of the proposition that, a women will be more likely to continue in employment if her partner views her job as important to her well-being, the living standards of the family, and if he supports and encourages her in her decision. However, most men were said to have left the decision up to the woman herself. In the minority of cases in which partners did have strong views regarding future employment though women did tend to comply with their wishes.

A note of caution is perhaps necessary in interpreting these findings since the evidence on this hypotheses comes from the views of men as reported by their wives or partners, and is thus subject to the woman's interpretation.

Findings in relation to the two hypotheses regarding the influence of "structural" factors, ie. employment practices and childcare, are in sharp contrast to one another. No evidence was found to support the proposition that, women will be more likely to continue in employment where their employer offers family-friendly employment facilities, such as, flexible hours, job-sharing, part-time working and parental leave. The most surprising element of this finding, however, was the low level of awareness amongst respondents and their low levels of expectation regarding availability of such facilities.

In contrast to this, there was much evidence to suggest that women were more likely to continue in employment if childcare facilities were available. Eighty-four per cent of those intending to return to work indicated that they could not have done so without satisfactory and affordable childcare. More than eighty per cent of non-returners said that availability of childcare had influenced their decision to some extent. Whilst the

significance of childcare for women's employment decisions is not in doubt, these findings must again however, be interpreted with caution. As noted above, those intending to return to work may well have had a rather different approach to the search for childcare facilities, and to their affordability and suitability, compared to non-returners.

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that a probabilistic relationship does exist between a number of the factors proposed in Chapter I and the likelihood of a return to employment following maternity leave. The significance of each individual factor is demonstrated in simple statistical analysis. This is of interest in itself and as a means of supporting or rejecting a number of monocausal explanations suggested by previous studies. An overall aim of this study, however, was to demonstrate and explore the complexity of the employment decisions made by women on becoming mothers. The analysis thus far is not sufficiently powerful to explore, and to provide an understanding of, the complexities involved in the decision making process.

Chapter 6 discusses the further analysis which was necessary in order to explore the ways in which factors, in themselves significant for the employment decision, relate to one another and are interrelated. Areas of overlap, and the ways in which factors combine, were analysed to provide a profile of women likely to continue in employment following maternity leave. Thus a further step is taken in exploring a complex process, and in establishing what linkages exist between individuals, located in partnerships and households, constructing their own beliefs and actions, and the influences which significant others, and wider social forces exert upon them.

CHAPTER 6

DISTINGUISHING RETURNERS FROM NON-RETURNERS

Chapter Five looked at the strength of the relationship between a number of individual factors and the likelihood of a woman returning to work following maternity leave. The factors used were those suggested by the propositions discussed in Chapter One, and were indicative of:

- partner's employment and earnings;
- the woman's employment status, education and earnings;
- household financial arrangements;
- the "meaning" of work to the individual, ie. work orientation;
- partner's attitudes and support
- degree of sharing of household and caring responsibilities;
- availability of "family-friendly" employment;
- availability of childcare facilities.

It was always clear, however, that no one factor would, in itself, be sufficient to explain the decision which a woman makes regarding employment following childbirth. That, indeed, has been the underlying rationale for the study. This chapter is therefore concerned with the interaction of those factors which were considered significant for women's employment decisions following maternity leave.

The chapter opens with a discussion of the limitations of the univariate analysis undertaken thus far. These suggest the need for a more powerful analytical tool with which to explore, and provide an understanding of, the complexity of women's employment decisions.

The alternatives for analysis are then explored, in terms of the various statistical techniques which might be appropriate to the multi-variate analysis required, and the choice of Discriminant Analysis is discussed in some detail.

The overall "success" of the discriminant function in discriminating between returners and non-returners is reviewed. Finally the "failures", those cases which discriminant analysis proved incapable of classifying correctly as returners or non-returners, are considered in some detail to explore, in effect, the limitations of this study. It is concluded that the propositions, around which the study has been structured, and the factors suggested by those propositions to be influential in women's employment decisions following maternity leave, even when interacting in the most effective combination, will not always prove adequate to the task of explaining why some women continue in employment while others do not. It seems that other factors, not considered by the present study, may in some cases prove more influential than those arising from the hypotheses which formed the basis for this research. It seems also, that, in some instances the woman's decision simply defies explanation, at least on the basis of any of the theories proposed thus far.

This chapter incorporates a technical report of the discriminant analysis undertaken, however those with limited interest in the statistical technicalities may choose to proceed

directly to the discussion of the extent to which the discriminant function succeeded in distinguishing returners from non-returners (p.265).

LIMITATIONS OF UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS

As discussed in the introduction, this study was designed to collect data on a range of variables which were "suspected" of having the potential to be powerful discriminators. Data was collected and, as described in Chapter 5, an analysis carried out of the factors influencing a return to work, but it still proved difficult to ascertain whether all the variables, for which data had been collected, were strictly necessary or valuable in distinguishing between returners and non-returners. The relationship between a woman's own earning potential and the likelihood of her return to work serves to illustrate this difficulty but is but one of many examples. The findings revealed that high earners were significantly more likely to return than those with low earnings potential. But so too were women who were educated to degree level, who worked in high status occupations and who had spent more than ten years in the labour market or in the health service in particular. It was clear from this analysis that there was a strong correlation between all these factors, hence it is difficult to say with certainty what was the unique contribution of each in distinguishing between returners and non-returners, and which of the variables made the most significant contribution in relative terms. The findings did appear to confirm a relationship between a number of the characteristics initially suspected of influencing women's employment decisions and the likelihood of a return to work. The nature of the relationship however was not always apparent; in many cases it was less than straightforward and so the analysis thus far did not permit the drafting of a precise list of discriminating variables capable of distinguishing between the returner and the non-

returner groups. It seemed that many variables did, on an individual basis, contribute to the distinction between the groups, but it was recognised that no single variable could perfectly differentiate between those who intended to return to employment and those who did not. Difficulties surrounding a number of the univariate relationships revealed in the analysis of influencing factors suggested that it was only when variables, which were statistically significant in their own right, acted in conjunction with one another that their discriminating power was optimised. To use the earlier example, it was clear that returners were distinct from non-returners in terms of their earnings potential, with high earners significantly more likely to return. Not all high earning women did intend to return to work however and so it seemed that it was only when earnings potential acted in combination with some other, as yet unknown, factors, that it became powerful enough to precisely discriminate between returners and non-returners.

The complexity of the issues, and of the process, has been amply illustrated in the findings presented thus far. They suggest that a probabilistic relationship does exist between a number of the factors proposed in Chapter I and the likelihood of a return to employment following maternity leave. The significance of each individual factor was demonstrated in simple statistical analysis. This was of interest in itself, and as a means of supporting or refuting a number of monocausal explanations suggested by previous studies. It was not however, sufficiently powerful to explore, and to provide an understanding of, the complexities involved in the decision-making process. A further analysis was required of the ways in which those factors which have been found to be of significance for the employment decision, may be interrelated and relate to one another. Areas of overlap, and the ways in which the factors combine, had to be explored in order to establish the combination which would most accurately predict the likelihood of a

return to work or not, following maternity leave. Having ascertained membership of the "returner" or "non-returner" category, on the basis of an individual's "performance" on the range of variables used in the study, it would be possible to profile the woman who is likely to continue in employment following maternity leave. The profile would reflect her likely occupational level, and her earnings level; the type of household in which she is likely to live, in terms of income, relationships, and the sharing of resources and burdens; her likely held attitudes, beliefs and ideologies, and those of her partner, concerning motherhood and employment and the structural opportunities and constraints available to her for combining the two.

An analytical technique was thus required which would enable a study of the difference between the returning and non-returning groups with respect to several variables simultaneously. The technique must be capable of taking a number of variables and mathematically combining them in a way that would find a single dimension on which returners would be clustered at one end and non-returners at the other.

THE ALTERNATIVES FOR ANALYSIS

A number of statistical techniques were considered in order to find that most appropriate to the multivariate analysis required. Multiple regression, for example, would have allowed the simultaneous consideration of a number of variables. By using logistic regression it is possible to regress a discrete nominal variable, such as return or non-return on other continuous variables. It would thus have been possible to establish which of the variables would produce the greatest odds (chances) of a woman returning to work and hence conclude which of the variables made the greatest contribution to

discrimination. Regression analysis however, requires the assumption that for each value of the predictor variable, for example earnings, scores on the dependent variable be normally distributed with constant variances. It is best suited to continuous variables with constant linear relationships and was therefore not appropriate for analysis of the data in this study.

Another technique was however available which did not require assumptions about the variance of the dependent variable. Discriminant analysis is in fact designed to work with nominal dependent variables. As such it is a convenient technique for exploring the associations between a large set of independent variables and a dependent variable, such as the "return" variable in this study.

Discriminant analysis was then seen to have a great advantage over regression analysis in that the dependent variable could be a nominal measure. It does however have limitations, one of which is that it cannot ably handle a dependent variable with a large number of values. This posed no difficulties in the present study since only two values (1, 2) representing yes and no responses, attached to the dependent variable, and so discriminant analysis was selected as an appropriate technique for analysis of the data in this study.

Discriminant Analysis

Discriminant analysis is a broad term which refers to several closely related statistical procedures, not all of which will necessarily be used in a given research situation. Broadly speaking, these statistical procedures may be used for the purposes of

interpretation of data, in particular the study of multivariate differences between two or more groups, and/or for classification purposes, using several variables to predict the group membership of individual cases. (Klecka 1980). Whilst the former, interpretative aspects of the technique were of most relevance to the present study, it was also deemed useful, as a check on the adequacy of the discriminant function, to be able to classify the original set of cases to establish the percentage which might be correctly classified by the variables being used.

Researchers have used discriminant analysis in a wide variety of settings. It was first developed as a set of statistical procedures by Fisher (1936) in attempts to solve problems in physical anthropology and biology. In the social sciences, political scientists have found it useful in the study of voting behaviour. The most extensive applications of discriminant analysis however, have been by psychologists in areas such as personnel selection and educational testing.

The mathematical objective of discriminant analysis is to weight and linearly combine a set of discriminating variables in a fashion which will force a number of groups to be as statistically distinct as possible.

The prerequisites of the technique are that two or more groups exist which are presumed to differ on several variables, and that those "discriminating variables" can be measured at the interval or ratio level. Whilst ideally the measurement scheme will be continuous this is not, as with a number of variables, in the present case, absolutely necessary, so long as measurement is at least interval level, since discriminant analysis requires the computation of means, variances and covariances.

The basic assumptions underpinning discriminant analysis are, firstly that all the data cases should be members of two or more mutually exclusive groups. The groups, as in the present study, of "returners" and non-returners" must be defined so that each case belongs to one and only one group. The characteristics used to distinguish among the groups are called "discriminating variables". There are some limits on the statistical properties which the discriminating variables may have. No variable may be a linear combination of other discriminating variables. Likewise two variables which are perfectly correlated cannot be used at the same time. While these conditions are associated with accuracy in computation they also make sense intuitively. The variable defined by the linear combination, for example, does not contain any new information beyond what is contained in the components and so it is redundant.

Properties of Discriminant Analysis

A canonical discriminant function is a linear combination of the discriminating variables formed to satisfy certain conditions. By forming one or more such functions discriminant analysis attempts to find a single dimension on which, to use the example in this study, returners are clustered at one end and non-returners at the other. In other words the functions are formed in such a way as to maximise the separation of the groups. Once the discriminant function has been derived it may be used to pursue the research objectives of the technique, namely interpretation and/or classification. The interpretative aspects of the technique provide several tools for data analysis. Among these tools are statistical tests for measuring the success with which the discriminating variables actually discriminate when combined into the discriminant functions. The weighting coefficients can be interpreted much as in multiple regression or factor analysis. In this respect they

serve to identify the variables which contribute most to differentiation along the dimension or function. The use of discriminant analysis as a classification technique comes after the initial computation. Once a set of variables is found which provides satisfactory discrimination for cases with known group membership (as in the present study) a set of classification functions can be derived which will permit the classification of new cases with unknown memberships. This was not however a primary objective of the present study.

DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS APPLIED TO THE STUDY OF RETURNERS AND NON RETURNERS

As described above, a canonical discriminant function is a linear, mathematical, combination of the discriminating variables. The maximum number of unique functions which can be derived in this fashion is equal to the number of groups minus one ($g-1$) or the number of discriminating variables whichever is fewer. In this study, since the number of groups was two (ie. returners and non-returners, to which respectively the values 1 and 2 were attached) but there were a large number of discriminating variables, only one function could be derived. The importance of the number of groups stems from basic geometric principles. In general, two points in space define a line, three define a plane, four a 3-dimensional space and so on. The maximum number of dimensions needed to completely describe a set of points is one less than the number of points. In discriminant analysis each group (as measured by its centroid) is treated as a point, and each discriminant function is a unique dimension describing the location of that group relative to others.

Selection of Variables

The eight discriminating variables used in the present study to distinguish between the two groups, returners and non-returners, were selected on the basis of the analysis in Chapter 5 as indicators for each of the eight factors hypothesised to be influences upon the decision to return to work, or not following maternity leave. They were as follows:

- partner's number of jobs in past 5 years (as an indicator of employment security)
- woman's take home pay (as an indicator of earnings)
- household financial arrangements
- reasons for working (as an indicator of work orientation)
- partner's view on return to work or not (as an indicator of partner's attitude and support)
- how partner shares in looking after baby (as an indicator of degree of household sharing)
- part-time work available (as an indicator of family-friendly employment)
- availability of childcare

Direct and Stepwise Discriminant Analysis

There are three possible types of discriminant analysis; direct, hierarchical and stepwise. In direct discriminant analysis all the independent variables are entered into the analysis and enter the equation concurrently; in hierarchical discriminant analysis they enter according to a schedule set by the researchers; and in stepwise discriminant analysis statistical criteria alone determine the order of entry.

In this study, as in most, the researcher had no compelling reasons for giving some predictors higher priority than others, hence the hierarchical method was inappropriate and so direct or stepwise methods were considered applicable. It was decided initially to use the DIRECT method, since the number of discriminating variables was quite small, and so all independent variables passing a tolerance test (see below) were entered concurrently. In addition the STEPWISE method was used.

Outcomes and Limitations of DIRECT Discriminant Analysis

The SPSS DISCRIMINANT Subprogram provides measures for judging the importance of the discriminant function created. One such measure is its associated canonical correlation. This is a measure of association between the single discriminant function and the set of (g-1) dummy variables which define the g. group memberships. It indicates how closely the function and the "group variable" are related, which is just a measure of the functions ability to discriminate among the groups. The independent variables used are those listed above. The discriminant function was created directly from the entire set of independent variables, regardless of the discriminating power of each.

From the canonical correlation in this first DIRECT analysis (.655) (see appendix 5) it appears that the discriminant function is well correlated with the group ie the function can quite powerfully discriminate between the groups. This is borne out by the fact that 85.63% of "grouped" cases were correctly classified in the analysis.

Table 6.1 **Number of Cases Classified into each Group and Percentage of Cases Correctly Classified in the Direct Discriminant Analysis**

<i>Actual Group</i>	<i>No. of Cases*</i>	<i>Predicted Group Memberships</i>	
		Returners 1 (Yes)	Non-Returners 2 (No)
Group 1 Returners (Yes)	110	102 92.7%	8 7.3%
Group 2 Non-Returners (No)	50	15 30.0%	35 70.0%

Percentage of "Grouped" cases correctly classified 85.63%
 * *42 cases had at least one missing discriminating variable*
160 cases were used for this direct discriminant analysis.

This is not an entirely surprising outcome. The independent variables entered were those suggested by the preliminary analysis as indicators for each of the eight factors thought to influence the decision to return to work. Since many of them will have been discriminators of some significance in their own right, it was likely that in combination they would quite clearly distinguish returners from non-returners. Despite its apparent predictive accuracy however such a discriminant function may be a somewhat blunt instrument or insensitive tool to use for the purpose of separating the groups. It also seems likely that the full set of independent variables will contain excess and redundant information about group differences, and that while some of the variables are important discriminators in their own right others are making little unique contribution to discriminating among the groups. This is borne out in fact by the standardised discriminant function coefficients (Table 6.2). These coefficients are of analytic

importance in and of themselves. When the sign is ignored each coefficient represents the relative contribution of its associated variable to the function. The sign merely denotes whether the variable is making a positive or negative contribution.

Table 6.2 **Summary of Direct Discriminant Analysis**

<i>Standardised Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients</i>	
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Function 1</i>
Partner's job security (VAR038)	.057
Own Earnings (OSAL)	.692
Household financial management (FINANCE)	.222
Work orientation (VAR076R)	-.105
Partner's attitude (HISVIEW)	.077
Degree of sharing childcare (VAR082)	.492
Availability of part-time work (VAR086)	-.027
Availability of childcare (VAR117)	-.682

The standardised discriminant function coefficient produced for variables included in this direct method analysis show that whilst variables relating to own earnings, and to childcare, are making substantial relative contributions to the discriminant function, a number of others which have been entered concurrently, in the full set of variables, are making very little relative contribution. Examples are variables relating to part-time working, partner's job security, and partner's attitude. The degree to which childcare is shared within the household; the system of financial management, and work orientation, the "meaning" which work holds for the woman, fall somewhere between those two extremes.

Stepwise Inclusion of Variables

In this situation where the full set of independent variables almost certainly contains

excess information about group differences, and where some of the variables are clearly making very little unique contribution to discrimination it was considered useful to undertake a further analysis using the STEPWISE method to determine the entry of independent variables to the analysis. By subsequently selecting the "next best" discriminator at each step it was hoped that a reduced set of variables could be found which would be almost as good as the full set and which would provide further information regarding the relative contribution of the discriminating variables.

One possible reason why a number of variables make very little unique contribution to the discriminant function may be because the group means are very similar on those variables. In this study for example the group means for variables such as own earnings, childcare sharing and work orientation are all similar, (Appendix 6). Also two or more of the variables may share the same discriminating information. Even though they may be individually good discriminators, when some such variables are employed in the analysis, the remainder become redundant. They do not contribute to the analysis because their unique contributions are insufficient. Unless there are particularly strong theoretical reasons for keeping them it is usually advisable to eliminate weak or redundant variables. Their presence complicates the analysis and they may even increase the number of misclassifications if the classification elements of discriminant analysis are used. One way to eliminate unnecessary variables and to produce a sufficiently powerful but economical, set is by using a stepwise procedure to select the most useful discriminating variables.

The stepwise procedure begins by selecting the individual variable which provides the greatest univariate discrimination on the basis of the selection criterion determined by the

user. In this case the variable chosen was own earnings. The procedure then pairs this first variable with each of the remaining variables, one at a time, to locate the combination which produces the greatest discrimination. The variable which contributes to the best pair is selected and enters the equation; in this case the variable selected was availability of childcare. These two variables are then combined with each of the remaining variables, one at a time, to form triplets which are evaluated on the selection criterion. The triplet with the best criterion value determines the third variable to be selected. In this case the variable selected was degree of sharing childcare.

Following Step 3, no remaining variables could provide the minimum required level of improvement in the discriminating power of the function. With the SPSS DISCRIMINANT sub program intermediate results are printed following each step and these are reproduced at Appendix 6.

As variables are selected for inclusion some variables previously selected may lose their discriminating power. This occurs because the information that they contain about group differences is now available in some combination of the other included variables. Such variables are redundant and should be eliminated. Thus at the beginning of each step each of the previously selected variables is tested to determine if it still makes a sufficient contribution to the discrimination. If any are eligible for removal the least useful is eliminated, although this was not necessary in this analysis. A variable which has been removed at one step may be reintroduced later if it satisfies the selection criterion at that time.

In this study, as can be seen in more detail in Appendix 6, stepwise discriminant analysis,

after three steps produced an optimal set of discriminating variables made up of own earnings, availability of childcare, and degree of sharing of childcare. The sequence in which variables are selected does not necessarily coincide with their relative importance. Because of intercorrelations (shared discriminating power) an important discriminator may be selected late.

Selection Criteria in Stepwise Discriminant Analysis

Stepwise procedures must employ some measure of discrimination as the criterion for selection at each step. In this case the selection criterion used was Wilks' Lambda (or the U statistic) which is the within-groups sum of squares divided by the total sum of squares. At each step a variable was included or cast out depending upon whether its Lambda, when computed with already selected variables was low, suggesting strong discriminating power, or high, suggesting weak powers of discrimination, with ratios varying from 0.0 to 1.0. As Wilks' Lambda was used the criterion was the overall multivariate F ratio for the test of differences among the group centroids. The variable which maximises the F ratio takes into consideration the differences between all the centroids and the cohesion (homogeneity) within the group. It was therefore considered appropriate for the purposes of this analysis. Since each of the possible selection criteria emphasises a different aspect of "separation" however care must be taken to select an appropriate criterion. The emphasis in Wilks' Lambda is as outlined above. The available alternatives for STEPWISE selection criteria would have been:

- MAHAL, which seeks to maximise the mahalonobis distance between the

two closest groups. This was not considered appropriate to an analysis involving just two groups.

- the variable which maximises the smallest F ratio between pairs of groups is selected under MAXMINF
- MINRESID is another criterion which tends to separate groups that are close together, the objective here is to minimise R, the residual variation
- RAO is the final criterion available. This is RAO's V, a generalised distance measure. The variable selected is the one which contributes the largest increase in V when added to the previous variables.

Most stepwise selection programs also require a variable to pass certain minimum conditions before it can even be tested on a selection criterion such as Wilks' Lambda. These conditions are, firstly, a tolerance test to assure computational accuracy and secondly a partial F statistic to assure that the increased discrimination provided by the variable exceeds a level determined by the user. It is perhaps worth noting how the variables used in the present study performed on these preconditions. The tolerance test as noted above is designed to preserve computational accuracy. If the variable being tested is a linear combination (or nearly so) of one or more of the variables already entered, its tolerance will be zero. A variable with a small tolerance (eg less than .001) is likely to cause inaccuracies in computing and in any case it would have no unique information to contribute.

On the first step the tolerance of variables is always 1.0 because no variables have yet been entered to the analysis. At step 2 the tolerance of variables will be less than 1.0 because it represents one minus the squared correlation between the variable already

entered and the respective variable. In this analysis the minimum tolerance level specified was the program's default level of .001, and no variables, even at step 3, approached that level, the lowest tolerance level being that of .876 attached to household financial management (FINANCE) at step 3. A variable is also considered eligible for selection only if its partial multivariate F ratio is larger than a specified value. The partial F ratio measures the discrimination introduced by the respective variable, after taking into account the discrimination achieved by the other already selected variables. On the first step, the so-called F-to-enter test corresponds to the univariate F statistic because no variables have yet entered the analysis. The F-to-enter test is performed at each step before the variable can be evaluated on the selection criterion ie Wilks' Lambda in this case. The minimum F-to-enter specified in this analysis was 3.840. At each step the F-to-enter statistic for each variable becomes smaller because it is the partial F for the discrimination added by the respective variables, after already entered variables have created as much discrimination as possible. If the F is too small, that is below the specified level that variable would not be eligible for evaluation by Wilks' Lambda, the selection criterion, because it is clearly not adding enough to the overall discrimination. Throughout this stepwise analysis a number of variables did not meet the minimum condition. Variables such as partner's attitude (HISVIEW) with an F-to-enter of .653, and part-time working (VAR086) with an F to enter of .162 clearly were not making a contribution to discrimination at the required level.

In addition, variables are tested for removal from the analysis on the basis of their multivariate F. In this case the maximum F-to-remove value was specified at 2.71 and the partial multivariate F values had to be less than that for removal to take place. Here what is being tested is the significance of the decrease in discrimination which would

occur should that variable be removed from the list of variables already selected. Again, this F-to-remove test was performed at the beginning of each step, to see if there were in the analysis, any variable which no longer made a sufficiently large unique contribution to discrimination. A variable that was a good choice at an earlier step may now be no longer valuable because variables entered later duplicated its contribution. This was not, however, the case for any variables in the current stepwise analysis.

On the final step the F-to-remove statistic can be used to obtain the rank order of the unique discriminating power carried by each of the selected variables. The variable with the largest F-to-remove makes the greatest contribution to overall discrimination above and beyond the contributions already made by the other variables. The variable with the second largest F-to-remove makes the second most important contribution and so forth. This is not necessarily the same ranking that would be obtained from a univariate F, because the univariate F measures the variable's total discriminating power without considering how much might be shared by other variables.

In this case on the final step the rank order as produced by the F-to-remove statistic was as presented in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 **Contribution of Discriminating Variables in Rank Order**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>F-to-remove</i>
Own earnings (OSAL)	45.538
Availability of Childcare (VAR117)	36.437
Degree of Sharing Childcare (VAR082)	15.516

What Table 6.3 shows is that a woman's own earnings made the greatest contribution to overall discrimination between returners and non-returners, above and beyond the contributions already made by other variables. Second in importance in this rank order was availability of childcare, and third was the degree to which the woman and her partner share in the care of their child.

This is the same rank order as that produced by the standard discriminant function coefficients which represent the relative contribution, either positive or negative, being made by the respective variables to the function, and which also take into consideration the simultaneous contributions of all the other variables.

In the current study only one discriminant function could be derived since there were only two groups and a larger number of discriminating variables. It is nonetheless of interest to determine the strength of the discriminating power of the function, thus derived, and to assess whether that single dimension is capable of representing all the observed differences between the groups. The statistical significance of the discriminant function may be tested using Wilks' Lambda. The lower the Lambda value the greater the discriminating power of the function, ie the more separate are the two groups. As Lambda increases, towards its maximum value of 1.0, it is reporting progressively less discrimination, and when it equals 1.0 there are no group differences. In this case, after the first, and only, discriminant function had been derived Lambda was reasonably low, at .586, and the chi-square test carried out revealed significant differences between the groups along the function or dimension ($X^2 = 83.722$, df3) ($p < 0.001$), thereby suggesting that the function derived had significant powers of discrimination. This was confirmed by another of the measures provided by the SPSS DISCRIMINANT sub

program for judging the importance of the discriminant function derived, that is by the associated canonical correlation which was described above in relation to the analysis undertaken using the direct method. From the fact that the canonical correlation for the one discriminant function derived in this study was .644, it appears that the discriminant function is well correlated with the groups. In other words the function is moderately powerful in its ability to discriminate among the groups.

Table 6.4 Summary of Step-wise Discriminant Analysis

<i>Standardised Canonical Discriminant Function Co-efficients</i>	
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Function I</i>
Own earnings (OSAL)	0.764
Availability of Childcare (VAR117)	-0.700
Degree of Sharing Childcare (VAR082)	0.468
<i>Canonical Discriminant Function Evaluated at Group Mean (Group Centroids)*</i>	
<i>Group</i>	<i>Function I</i>
1 (Returners)	0.563
2 (Non-returners)	-1.239

* *If the classification equation, when used on unknown cases, was to result in a score which is nearer 0.563 than -1.239, the individual would be classified as belonging to Group 1 (Yes Returners). If the equation was to result in a score which is nearer -1.239 than 0.563, the individual would then be classified as belonging to Group 2 (No - Non-returners).*

Such results indicate that there is a moderately wide distinction between the two groups.

Table 6.5 **Number of Cases Classified into each Group and % of cases correctly classified in the Discriminant Analysis**

<i>Actual Group</i>	<i>No. of Cases</i>	<i>Predicted Group Membership</i>	
		Returners 1 (Yes)	Non-Returners 2 (No)
Group 1 Returners (Yes)	146	131 89.7 %	15 10.3 %
Group 2 Non-Returners (No)	56	17 30.4 %	39 69.6 %

Percentage of "grouped" cases correctly classified: 84.16%

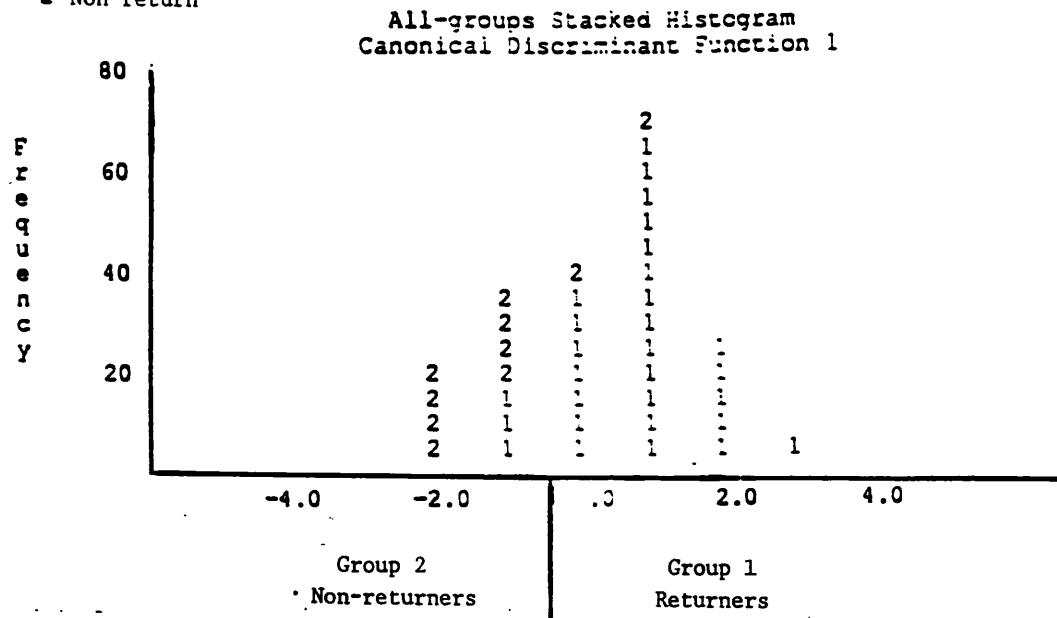
Graphical Presentation of Results

When, as in this case, only one discriminant function may be derived, the data cases may be arranged along a straight line by a "one function plot". This shows what portions of the function are "occupied", but it does not give a very clear indication or "feel" for the density of points, especially when there are quite a large number of vases. An alternative strategy, as in Figure 19 below, is to prepare a histogram. This enables a comparison of the relative locations of the groups, and provides a graphic understanding of how the groups are separated and the distances between them.

FIGURE 11 - Histogram - Density and Distribution of Groups

Symbols used in plots
Symbol

- 1 Return
2 Non-return



In this histogram the horizontal axis is the one discriminant function derived, measured in standard deviation units. The vertical axis is frequency. A symbol for the case (here the group numbers, 1 for returners and 2 for non-returners) is placed at each interval containing a data case. For the second and subsequent cases falling into an interval the "1s" or "2s" are stacked one atop the other so that the height of the stack denotes the number of cases in that interval. A quick glance can then reveal the density and distribution of the group. In this case the much greater density of the returners group (group 1) is graphically illustrated.

THE EXTENT OF "SUCCESS" OF THE DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION

The findings of the data collection exercise and the analysis of factors influencing the decision, described in Chapter 5, suggested that women intending to return to employment after maternity leave, differed significantly from those not intending to return, in a number of ways. The univariate statistics derived from this analysis however, while of interest in themselves, told us little about the multivariate differences between returners and non-returners, and since it is recognised that no single variable will perfectly differentiate between these groups, an analysis was required which would enable a study of the differences between groups with respect to several variables simultaneously.

Discriminant analysis was used to study these multivariate differences. An initial analysis, using the DIRECT method suggested that the eight variables, indicators for each of the eight factors hypothesised to influence the decision to return to work following maternity leave in combination produced a moderately powerful discriminant function capable of discriminating between returner and non-returner groups and of correctly classifying 85.63% of cases as returners or non-returners. This initial analysis also produced (from their standardised canonical discriminant function coefficients) a "rank order" for the contribution which each variable was making to discrimination. It is clear that the woman's own earnings potential, the availability of childcare, and the degree to which she and her partner shared the "informal" care of their child within the household, were the most significant factors discriminating between the returner and non-returner groups. The way in which household finances were managed and the meaning which work holds for a woman,

specifically whether she has an expressive employment orientation, also made a reasonable contribution in distinguishing between the groups. Partners' attitudes, their level of job security and the availability of family-friendly employment practices, specifically the availability of part-time work, on the other hand, seemed to contribute little to the power of the discriminant function.

Given the considerable variation in the level of contributions being made by each of the variables it was considered useful to attempt to specify a more precise list of variables, a more precise combination of those variables capable of distinguishing between returner and non-returner groups. Hence a further discriminant analysis was undertaken using the STEPWISE method.

The DISCRIMINANT sub program in SPSS selected three discriminating variables in a three-step STEPWISE procedure before recognising that additional contributions to discrimination from remaining variables would be non significant. A more precise combination of three variables relating to, - own earnings; availability of childcare; and the degree to which "informal" childcare was to be shared between the woman and her partner - produced a moderately powerful discriminant function. The function derived was capable of a considerable degree of separation between returner and non-returner groups, as indicated by a Wilks' Lambda of .586 and a canonical correlation of .643, and the fact that 84.16% of cases were correctly classified by this discriminant function, which was not significantly different to the result produced when using all eight variables.

In some respects the outcomes of this multivariate analysis served to strengthen the

evidence already obtained, and presented in Chapter 5, of a relationship between individual factors and the likelihood of a return to work following maternity leave. The importance, for example, of earnings level, as a discriminator between returners and non-returners was apparent even from the univariate analysis of the data, as was availability of childcare, evidenced in both the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study.

From the analysis of factors influencing return, however, it was also clear that not all high-earning women did intend to return to work following maternity leave, and by no means all of the non-returners cited lack of childcare as a significant influence upon their decision.

Using the techniques of discriminant analysis, it becomes apparent that such variables optimise their powers of discrimination, and are capable of accurately distinguishing between returner and non-returner groups, only when they exist and operate in combination and conjunction with one another, and with other variables.

In the final analysis the most powerful combination of factors proved to be, a woman's own earnings potential, acting in conjunction with availability of childcare and the degree to which her partner shares in the care of their child.

It was not surprising, perhaps, that factors such as the availability of part-time work and the system used for household financial management failed to make additional contributions of much significance to the power of the discriminant function. The earlier, univariate analysis had produced little evidence in support of the relationship

between availability of family-friendly employment practices and the likelihood of a return to work following maternity leave. The evidence was similarly unconvincing in relation to the influence which the system of household financial management might have upon women's employment decisions.

It was rather more surprising to find that partners' attitudes and work orientations, both of which had differentiated those intending to return from non-returners at a statistically significant level in the univariate analysis, added nothing of significance to the optimum combination of earnings, childcare and care-sharing, and thus did nothing to enhance the power of the discriminant function produced by step-wise discriminant analysis. This does not mean, however, that these factors do nothing at all to distinguish returners from non-returners - only that they are much less important than the combination selected.

EXPLORING THE "FAILURES" OF THE DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION

The discriminant function derived from this analysis was sufficiently powerful to correctly classify 84% of cases. It must be said however that not all women could be classified as returners or non-returners on the basis of their earnings potential, availability of childcare, and the degree to which their partner was prepared to share in the care of his child. For just under 16.0% of the sample, some 32 women, it seemed that factors other than those above were involved, and indeed that their decisions were influenced by factors other than any of those suggested by the hypotheses which this study set out to test. This seemed to be especially true of those not intending to return to work, more than thirty percent of whom were misclassified,

compared to just over ten per cent of returners (see Table 6.5 and Figure 9).

Since the primary aim of the study was to gain a fuller understanding of the complex decisions made by women on the transition to motherhood, a more detailed analysis was clearly required of those thirty two cases, for whom, the otherwise powerful, combination of earnings, childcare, and partner's sharing, was inadequate to explain their decision.

Unpredicted Returners

Fifteen of those intending to continue in employment were not correctly classified by the discriminant function and therefore may be regarded as anomalies or exceptions.

In the case of ten of these returners, further detailed analysis of questionnaire responses revealed some interesting information and gave some clear indications as to why they had not been correctly classified by the discriminant function. One low-earner, whose partner did not share in childcare, nonetheless intended to return to work because of an ambition to retrain in nursing from her state enrolled status to that of registered general nurse. This retraining would, she believed, substantially enhance both her career prospects and her earnings potential. Another low-earning, enrolled nurse, explained that she was going back to work because she had been able to secure part-time working on night duty, an arrangement which would mean that she need not incur childcare costs, and so her return became worthwhile financially to a degree that a return to day duty would not have been. Hence both these women had reasons, other than those defined by the discriminant function, for their

somewhat, against the odds, return to work. That was true also of the other eight "unpredicted" returners. These were all women with low-earnings potential and six also claimed that their partners did not share in the care of their child - hence the failure to correctly classify them, it would seem. Three were employed as enrolled nurses, a further three as nursing auxiliaries or assistants, and the remaining two were involved in clerical work at basic grades. In all these cases the women had a reason, other than their earnings potential, availability of childcare, or a sharing partner, for returning to work following maternity leave. They tended to articulate this reason quite clearly when asked to state "up-front" the most important influences upon their decision, and when responding to the open-ended questions at the end of the interview. Five of the eight had an unemployed partner and viewed themselves as the family breadwinner, for the present at least. One woman, although her partner was currently employed, viewed his employment as insecure. He had had more than three employers, and periods of unemployment, over the past five years. Another woman was married to a full-time student whose course would not be completed for another two years. The final "unpredicted" returner was a single parent.

All of these women, although low-earners, valued the perceived security of their own job, given the precarious financial state of their households. The majority, having an unemployed partner, foresaw no difficulties in obtaining no-cost childcare - despite the fact that a number of those partners at present took no part in the care of the child.

In the remaining five cases of "unpredicted" returners further analysis of questionnaire responses was less successful in shedding light upon why they had not

been correctly classified. For three of these women the only feature which did not fit the profile of the "typical" returner was an absence of partners sharing in childcare. The other two cases were low-earners whose partners did not share in childcare. Hence they also did not fit the profile of the typical returner, but no explanation was forthcoming as to why they should have, in the event, gone "against the odds" of not returning.

Unpredicted Non-Returners

A much higher proportion of non-returners, over thirty percent, were not correctly classified by the discriminant function. Of these seventeen women further analysis of questionnaire responses again provided useful insights as to why the discriminant function had failed to classify them correctly.

In eight cases in which the statistical analysis failed to classify correctly the women were all high-earners, three of whom had a partner who shared in the care of their child. These are particularly interesting cases which, although small in number, demonstrate very vividly the heterogeneity of the population of working women, and the variety and complexity of the issues which exert an influence upon women's employment decisions following maternity leave. It is therefore useful to focus upon each of them individually.

Two of the women had fairly straightforward practical reasons for going against the odds of a high-earning woman returning to work. One, a senior physiotherapist, had been informed, just two weeks prior to the birth, that she was having twins. Hence

a well planned childcare arrangement, involving her mother and sister, was no longer considered feasible, and this women also felt that, regardless of the childcare arrangements, she simply would not be able to cope with the demands of two children and her job. The other woman, a staff nurse/acting sister, on permanent night duty, had given birth to a Down's Syndrome baby with heart problems, who could not be left, as planned, with her husband at nights, and a neighbour each morning. She too emphasised the stresses involved in her situation, regardless of what facilities might be available.

The other six high-earning women who did not intend to continue in employment gave reasons substantially akin to those of their low-earning colleagues. They expressed views that it was "best for the child", that they "enjoyed" the child and wanted to be with it. In a number of cases, however, these "reasons" were coupled with others. A staff nurse, for example, as well as believing that "a young child needs its mother" also said that she felt "undervalued" in the health service and intended to retrain for something completely different when her child was older. A doctor, a senior house officer, said that she simply did not want the stress of trying to combine care for a young child with a demanding job, in which she could be required to work up to one hundred hours a week. Similarly a superintendent radiographer said that she could not face the prospect of leaving her child before eight o'clock each morning, doing a stressful job all day, and arriving home too tired even to play with the child.

In a further six cases, although the women were low earners, their partner did share in the care of their child, and the availability or otherwise of childcare had not played

a significant part of their decision not to return to work.

These women had, however, rated a factor, other than those being tested in this study, as the most significant influence upon their decision not to return to work. All of these factors broadly related to a desire to bring up the child themselves, a belief that it was "best for the child", or an implicit understanding within their partnership that they would leave work on becoming a mother. One woman commented that "there was no real decision to be made - we always knew that when we started a family I'd give up work"; another that "my husband feels very strongly that if you can possibly afford it you should stay at home with your children".

In two more of the seventeen cases further analysis of questionnaire responses failed to give any clear indication of reasons why they could not be correctly classified. Both were low-earners, with non-sharing partners, for whom non-availability of childcare had been a significant influence upon their decision not to return to work.

One other low earner, whose partner did not share in the care of their child, claimed that the "real" reason for her non-return was because she could not get part-time night work, but that, in any case, as an enrolled nurse she felt she had no career prospects.

SUMMARY

This analysis suggests that it is possible to predict with reasonable accuracy, that a high earning woman, to whom suitable and affordable childcare is available, and whose partner shares in caring for their child, will be likely to continue in

employment following maternity leave. It also suggests however that, in any cohort of new mothers, there will be a number of women for whom such a combination of factors, whilst perhaps necessary or desirable, will not be sufficient to determine their future employment. Such women are influenced by factors other than those suggested by the hypotheses which this study has been designed to test, hence the limitations of the present study become apparent in that a number of other hypotheses might have proved as helpful or more so in explaining women's employment decisions as some of those actually tested.

The factors limiting the success of the discriminant function were many and varied. Those which occurred most consistently, however, related to: women's perceptions of the significance of their earnings for the financial stability of their household (in the case of low-earners who nonetheless intended to return to employment); to a belief in the benefits of full-time motherhood (spread across the spectrum of respondents); and an unwillingness to accept the stresses of the "double burden" of motherhood and employment, most notable amongst high earners, such as a doctor and a superintendent radiographer, who had also perhaps the most demanding and most stressful jobs.

The outcomes of this analysis, and the specification of factors which, in combination, distinguish those who will continue in employment following childbirth from those who will not, have important lessons for those who wish to increase the proportion of mothers who return to work and implications for individuals, in households, for employers, and for the wider society.

The concluding chapter will reflect on the research upon which the present study is based, its contribution to the body of knowledge on motherhood and employment, and its limitations, as outlined in this chapter. It will reflect too upon the current situation regarding women's employment as revealed in the findings of this study, and upon what has changed and what has not. Policy options will be considered in terms of what the findings of this study suggest might be desirable policy goals. Finally, since the findings of this study have pointed to the incomplete state of our knowledge on many aspects of motherhood and employment, the concluding chapter will also explore some further directions for research.

CONCLUSION

Employment among women with children has grown rapidly in the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, since the 1980s. Nevertheless, motherhood remains the major correlate of female labour force participation, and women, on becoming a mother, still typically make a decision as to whether they should leave employment, interrupting their working lives to raise children, or continue in employment throughout their childbearing years. The decisions that they take about whether and when to work are becoming increasingly important to the economic well-being of families and to the operation of the labour market.

The broad aim of this study was to explore the decisions made by women on becoming a mother, and to gain an understanding of why some women continue in employment while others do not. Much of the rationale for the study stemmed from the perceived limitations of previous work, which had failed to explore the multi-dimensional nature of the issues involved in mothers' employment decisions, and the complexity of the decisions made.

The research for the study, which was undertaken in the period 1992-1995, was based on interviews with a sample of just over two hundred women, who were first-time

mothers, taking maternity leave from employment in the health service in Northern Ireland. The interviews were structured around eight propositions, suggesting a probabilistic relationship between various characteristics or circumstances and the likelihood of a woman returning to work following maternity leave.

This concluding chapter, as well as highlighting the main findings of the study, in relation to the hypotheses under investigation, provides an opportunity for reflections upon the research, its strengths and weaknesses, and the degree to which it has succeeded in doing what it set out to do, ie. to provide an explanation as to why some mothers return to work following maternity leave while others do not. Many believe that an increase in labour market participation amongst mothers of young children is a desirable policy goal. The attainment of that goal is explored in this chapter in terms of the implications for families; for issues of equality in the wider society; and for the role of women within households and the workplace. The policy instruments that might most appropriately be used to achieve the goal are discussed in the light of the findings from this study, which, in brief, suggest that the presence, and interaction, of a number of circumstances or factors may be of particular significance for women's employment decisions following maternity leave.

Finally, since the findings of the study, and reflections upon the research, have pointed to the incomplete state of our knowledge on many aspects of motherhood and employment, this concluding chapter will also suggest some further directions for research in this area.

THE FINDINGS

Evidence of Change

The study found that 72.3% of those interviewed intended to continue in employment, with the majority of returners, 76.0%, intending to go back to work on a full-time basis. These findings provided further evidence of an acceleration in the trend towards early return to full-time work following childbirth, observed in a number of recent studies, (McRae 1991, Harrop and Moss 1995).

The findings of the study also confirm an acceleration in other social trends. For example, the majority of those intending to return to work had partners who were also in full-time employment. Hence evidence of a trend towards an increase in dual-earner households, observed from the mid 1980s onwards (Harrop and Moss 1995), is reinforced by the findings of the current study.

The softening of attitudes towards mothers with pre-school children in employment, observed in social attitudes surveys from the late 1980s, was also confirmed by these findings. Whilst the majority of respondents preferred not to express any firm "judgemental" view on whether mothers of very young children should go out to work, only 27.2% said that they disagreed with such mothers working. Interestingly too, the women in this study who intended to return to work justified their decisions, and adopted a number of coping strategies, based on the importance of "quality time" with their child, and the benefits to the child of having a satisfied and fulfilled mother. All of which suggests changes in attitudes, and the likelihood of women beginning to contribute to the creation of a new discourse around motherhood and employment. The emergence of new

patterns of provision in childcare observed elsewhere (Brannen and Moss 1991), was also confirmed, although to a limited extent, by the findings of this study. While the majority of women were still reliant on immediate family, husbands, mothers/mothers-in-law, and other relatives, for care of their child, more than ten percent did plan to use a private day nursery, reflecting the growth, in Northern Ireland as elsewhere in the UK, of the private day care sector over recent years.

Much then has changed in relation to women's employment decisions following maternity leave. One of the primary aims of the study, however, was to explore the factors influencing such decisions, and so it is also of interest to consider what has been happening in relation to those factors found to be most significant for the decisions made by women on the transition to motherhood.

Analysis of the findings from this study would suggest that a woman who has high earnings potential, together with access to suitable and affordable childcare, and whose partner shares in the care of their child, is likely to continue in employment following maternity leave. Hence the evidence supports the following hypotheses:

- *Women with high earnings potential are more likely to continue in employment;*
- *a woman is more likely to return to work if childcare facilities are readily available; and*
- *a woman is more likely to return to work the more equally she and her partner share responsibility for childcare;*

These then were the factors found to be of significance for mothers' employment decisions. Before turning to a consideration of how those factors may themselves have altered, in a period which has seen such dramatic change in women's labour market participation, it is important to note, however, that not all of the employment decisions made by the women in this sample could be classified according to the presence or otherwise of such characteristics or circumstances. The findings of the study confirm the complexity of the decision-making process and suggest that amongst new mothers there will be a number, (in this case just under 16%) for whom influences such as earnings potential, availability of childcare, and domestic sharing, will not be sufficient to determine their future employment status. In this study there were a number of women who declared their decisions to have been influenced by factors other than those proposed in the hypotheses this study was designed to test. The range of such influences is discussed in some detail in Chapter 6. Such findings may well have implications for any "package" of measures proposed in support of parenting and employment, for no policy-maker can hope to change mothers' behaviour without also being aware of and addressing these dimensions.

Failure to Change

As outlined above, the evidence from this study suggests that much has changed in terms of women's labour market participation, and that the pace of change has in fact accelerated in recent years. Women are now more likely to continue in employment following childbirth, at least after a first birth; they are also more likely to return to full-time employment; attitudes towards mothers in employment are changing too, as are patterns of childcare, albeit slowly. Much then has changed, but paradoxically, in some

ways it seems that nothing has changed. There has been a revolution in recent years, evidenced by this study and others, in the numbers of working mothers in the labour force, and yet, to quote Hochschild (1989) it has been a "stalled revolution". Women have gone to work, but the workplace, the culture, and most of all the men have not adjusted themselves to this new reality" (p.235) The fact that motherhood continues to have an adverse effect on women's lifetime earnings and occupational mobility is again evidenced by the findings of this study, in which, although the majority of women did intend to return to work, and most of those to full-time employment, nonetheless more than a quarter of women intended to leave work, with the majority not planning to return until their children were at school (Figure I). Even amongst those who were going back to work there was a culture of impermanence, and a suggestion that they would only be able to continue if they could also satisfactorily discharge their primary duty as a mother. There was evidence too that a number of those going back on a full-time basis were doing so because that was the only basis on which they could retain their hard earned grading status and hence earning potential, and the only way in which they could avoid downward occupational mobility. Women making the transition to motherhood today face, it would seem, the same dilemma faced by women in the 1970s and 1980s. To stop work for a period of time, or to leave full-time employment and take a part-time job, can have serious and adverse effects on employment opportunities and earnings, as well as the potential for creating frustration and dissatisfaction. But to attempt to continue in full-time employment involves a heavy workload, stresses, tensions and conflicts, with the inherent danger of fulfilling neither the role of mother, nor that of employee, to a satisfactory degree.

That the dilemma remains is largely because little has changed in terms of the dominant

ideology about motherhood. Whilst overt hostility towards the employment of mothers of young children may have diminished, this greater acceptance of maternal employment does not seem to have changed assumptions about overall maternal responsibility for children and their care. The women in this study viewed the decision to continue in employment as a very personal one, it was their "choice", and thus they assumed that they would bear the primary responsibility for childcare, whether in full-time employment or not. That responsibility translated not just into financial provision, but required also the making and monitoring childcare arrangements, and extended to an acceptance that, if arrangements did not "work out" as planned, their career would be the one to be sacrificed in the interests of the child.

It seems then, that "at best adjustments are being made within existing ideological frameworks; new and more supportive frameworks are not emerging" (Hochschild 1989 p.258).

This study found that three factors were of particular significance for women's employment decisions, and that their influence was especially important where they co-existed in a particular set of circumstances. But has women's earnings potential, availability of childcare, and the willingness of partners to share in domestic labour, changed to any greater extent than the dominant ideology regarding motherhood?

Earnings

The sample achieved for this study had more high earning women than would be the case for the female population as a whole in Northern Ireland - nearly 40% of the sample had take-home pay of more than £200 per week compared to the women in the WWLS

(Montgomery, 1993) only 44% of whom were earning more than £100 per week (net). Those higher earnings did, it seems, have an effect upon the high percentage of women intending to continue in employment following maternity leave. In general, however as demonstrated above, women in Northern Ireland, and indeed throughout the UK, are more likely to be low-paid workers, where low pay is defined as that two-thirds below male median earnings. The reasons underlying the persistence of low earnings amongst female employees are explored below in "Policy Responses".

While the findings of this study, and of others, may suggest that high earning women are more likely to continue in employment, it is clear that the majority of women are more likely to be low earners, and in particular persistently to earn less than men. Hence the revolution in women's labour market participation may be "stalled" in yet another direction.

Household Sharing

Partners' willingness to share in childcare was found to be another factor of some significance for women's employment decisions following maternity leave. Only a minority of women in this study however, had received any reliable indication that their partner would share equally in the care of their child. Just over half (57.9%) of fathers had even taken time off work when their child was born. Only 11.4% of partners had helped care for the baby while the mother was on maternity leave, yet nearly half of those intending to return to work claimed that the father would, in future, share equally in caring for the child. There is evidence from a number of sources that men in dual-earner households do spend more time in domestic labour when there is a young child in the family (Horrell 1994, Gershuny et al 1994). There is little evidence, however, of

any revolutionary change in household relationships or in the gendering of care and no evidence of anything approaching equality in the sharing of domestic labour. More than fifty-four per cent of the women in this study said that they did all, or most, of the household tasks themselves, despite the presence of a very young and highly dependent infant.

Childcare

No mother with a pre-school child can return to work without arranging some form of childcare and this was the third in that combination of factors found to be of significance for women's employment decisions following maternity leave. More than 80% of those not intending to return to work claimed that their decision had been influenced by a lack of suitable and affordable childcare. So have changes in childcare provision kept pace with the momentous changes in women's labour market participation? Evidence from this study and from others (Turner 1993, Ward et al 1994) would suggest that they have not. Mothers and mothers-in-law are still the most likely sources of childcare for working women being used by 21.7% in this study, with a significant number - nearly 20% of returners - resorting to a complex combination of arrangements in order to meet their childcare needs. The biggest change in this area has been the response of the marketplace to the needs of working mothers and the consequent growth in private sector day care facilities. Ten per cent of women in this study planned to use private nurseries, significantly more than would have been the case even three years earlier (Turner 1993), but in fact the uneven provision of such facilities, and their very high costs, relative to other forms of childcare, put them beyond the reach of all but higher income families.

Employment Practices

At first sight it might appear that the workplace and employers have made greater moves to accommodate the "revolution" in women's employment than those espoused by either government or individuals within households. Even here, however, questions remain regarding the extent to which anything has really changed. "Family-friendly" practices, such as, flexible working, reduced hours, and job-sharing are certainly included in the employment policies of most public sector employers in the UK, including the health service in Northern Ireland, which provided the context for the present study. Few of the women interviewed, however, were aware of the existence of such facilities, and those who were, were sceptical as to their availability in practice. Just over a quarter of respondents (28.6%), for example, were aware of a job-sharing scheme and felt that it would be available to them. There was concern too about the implications of availing oneself of such facilities, in terms of pay and promotion prospects. Whilst the policies of employers, such as health care providers, have undoubtedly changed to embrace family-friendly employment, it seems that a culture of at worst hostility, at best apathy, towards working mothers has not always changed in line with such policies. Nor have employers done much to encourage the greater involvement of men in the care of their children. Fewer than half of the women in this study claimed that their partner's employer offered paternity leave, and less than ten per cent of those employers offered parental leave. Consequently, just over half of all men had taken leave around the time of the birth of their child, and several of these had taken holidays or unpaid leave.

Doubts remain then over the extent of changes in employment practices over recent years. Certainly it would appear that, the degree to which patterns and hours of work have changed, in no way matches the revolutionary changes in women's labour market

participation. It would seem that, despite the changes that have been made, the world of paid employment remains oriented towards the stereotypical male employee, for whom employment is taken to be a, if not the, central life interest.

The findings of this study would suggest that, although much has changed and something of a revolution has taken place in women's, and in particular mothers' employment patterns, less has changed in households, the workplace, or society in general, to take account of, keep pace with, or accommodate that revolution. Hence the "choices" which women make continue to be constrained by their circumstances.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH

The broad aim of this research was to explore, and to attempt to provide an explanation, for the fact that some women continue in employment following the birth of a child while others do not. Previous studies suggested that a number of factors might be of significance for women's employment decisions following maternity leave. Hence a series of hypotheses were constructed assuming a probabilistic relationship between those factors and the likelihood of a mother continuing in employment. Major criticisms of previous studies had been; their perceived failure to explore the complexity of the decision-making process; a tendency to focus on a single "reason", or at best upon a limited number of factors, often determined by the researcher's own academic discipline; and the manner in which they tended to reduce explanations of employment decisions to the level of women's "reasons" for working.

The present study's contribution to the body of knowledge on motherhood and

employment derives from its efforts to explore the complexity of the issues involved. Much of the rationale for the study indeed stems from a recognition that no one factor could, in itself, be sufficient to explain the decisions which a woman makes regarding employment following childbirth.

That rationale notwithstanding, however, it must be acknowledged that the approach adopted had both strengths and weaknesses.

In Chapter 3 the decision to use a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods was discussed in some detail. In the event, that methodological blend proved to be one of the strengths of the research design, in that it yielded what might be described as two different types of data.

The majority of questions asked during the interviews were structured and were coded on the basis decided upon at the pilot stage of the project. The quantitative data so collected were used for statistical analysis. In addition there was the qualitative material acquired from responses to the open ended questions.

The two types of data have had different uses. The quantitative data has proved particularly useful in establishing patterns of behaviour in relation to, for example, return to work, use of childcare facilities, sharing of domestic work and childcare. In general the data analysed qualitatively helped to identify conceptual issues; the qualitative analysis fleshed out the coded responses, elaborated on meanings already suggested by the codes and in some cases added new meanings. For example, examination of the comments from women on how they made the decision about returning to work revealed that for

many it was not even regarded as a decision, it was inevitable, taken for granted, something that was always bound to happen. Those who did regard it as a decision to be made often saw it as a very personal responsibility, a lonely road in many ways. These issues were addressed quantitatively, but if they had simply been approached quantitatively relying only on codes derived from structured questions, such insights would have been lost.

There was a second way in which the two approaches to analysis proved valuable and vindicated the combined approach adopted. That was in helping to explain, through the qualitative analysis, some of the contradictions and inconsistencies which seemed to arise within the quantitative data. Examples of these were the apparent inconsistency between women's attitudes to their own employment and their attitudes to working mothers in general, or in another instance the way in which women confidently asserted that their partner would share responsibility equally for childcare when they returned to work despite indicating, in answer to an earlier question, that no sharing had occurred in the past. In both instances an insight was gained into the woman's interpretation of her situation from comments volunteered in response to the open-ended questions in the survey.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the qualitative data came, however, from the understanding and insights which it provided regarding the so-called "deviant" cases, ie. those who did not fit the profile and classification for returners or non-returners achieved from the quantitative (discriminant) analysis.

Since a primary aim of this study was to gain a fuller understanding of the complex

employment decisions made by women in the transition to motherhood, an analysis was required of the 32 cases for whom the, otherwise powerful, combination of earnings, childcare, and degree of care-sharing within the household, was inadequate to explain their decision. The qualitative data, most of which was obtained from responses to the open-ended questions at the end of the interview, provided insights into the decisions made by at least three quarters of the women who were incorrectly classified as either returners or non-returners using discriminant analysis.

Chapter 6, pp.272-277, provides a detailed discussion of these qualitative findings. The overall conclusion must be, however, that whilst it is possible to predict the likelihood of a woman making a particular employment decision, with reasonable accuracy, from the sensitive use of a quantitative technique, such as discriminant analysis, nonetheless, in any cohort of new mothers there will be a number of women who, for a variety of reasons, do not "fit" the profile of the typical returner or non-returner. Hence it is clear that one of the limitations of a purely quantitative approach, in this type of work, is its inability to allow, in its generalisations, for individuals who do not perform as expected. In this study, whilst quantitative analysis proved valuable, not least in locating these so-called "deviant" cases, a qualitative study was needed to add to an understanding of the behaviour of such individuals, and in order to evolve a set of insights which might begin to explain the individual variants which surround such behaviour. This was attempted using the data obtained from responses to open-ended questions. It must be said, however, that this was limited and further research is needed, perhaps using a case-study approach, in order to obtain more adequate profiles of those who did not conform to the ideal-types suggested by the purely quantitative analysis. Such further research would allow for a fuller, more complete understanding of the behaviour of individuals, as well

as generalisations regarding returners and non-returners, in work of this nature. It would be of value also in enabling the development of a more complete set of hypotheses for testing in further studies. Such studies may eventually account for, and ensure more accurate predictions of, the behaviour of larger proportions of the female population, in respect of their employment decisions following maternity leave.

The study did suffer then from a number of limitations, both in terms of research design and in the extent to which it succeeded in achieving its overall aim, for although it did succeed in unravelling the complexity of the employment decisions made by the majority of the sample studied, it could not explain in all cases why some women return to work following maternity leave while others do not.

In terms of the research design an obvious limitation lay in the fact that the sample used was derived from one specific sector of the labour market. These women were first time mothers who were all employed in the public sector, and in one specific segment of the public sector, ie in health care. Hence, as discussed in Chapter 4, when compared with a national sample, such as that used for the PSI study (McRae 1991), or a Northern Ireland sample, such as that used for the WWLS (Kremer and Montgomery 1993), this sample over-represented women in associate professional and technical jobs, and under-represented women in manual jobs. The women in this sample might be described as a privileged group. They were more highly qualified than women in the population as a whole, nearly one quarter had University degrees or equivalent. They were more highly paid than women in general, with 61% earning as much as or more than their partners, in a society in which women's average earnings remain at just over 70% of male earnings (New Earnings Survey (NI) 1995). All these factors were found to be

significant for their employment decisions following maternity leave. But such variances from the position of women in general must be borne in mind when interpreting the findings from the study and generalisations from the findings demand caution.

The fact that it provided a "snap-shot" picture of women's employment intentions at one particular point in time, (at around the fifteenth week of maternity leave), might be considered a further limitation of the study. It is acknowledged that a number of those who had decided to return, may have done so, in the event, on a temporary basis only. It is possible that these mothers, in particular because they benefited from Contractual Maternity Pay, were returning to their former jobs for a limited period only, because failure to return would incur a financial penalty - the refund of contractual maternity pay less their entitlement to Statutory Maternity Pay. It is also possible that, for a period following the initial return to work, women intended to make an assessment of the ways in which caring for a child articulated with a full-time job, before making a more permanent decision regarding continuity of employment. A number of those interviewed indeed implied that they would "see how things go", and as observed above, there was something of a culture of impermanence surrounding employment plans in general. In order to confirm that women intending to return to work, and in particular to full-time employment, remained in this form of working, or indeed to confirm that those resigning remained out of employment, would, however, have required a longitudinal study, which was beyond the resources of the present project. In this context it is perhaps useful then to bear in mind the findings of a recent study by Glover and Arber (1995). From a secondary analysis of the 1992 Labour Force Survey (Spring Quarter) they provide an interesting contrast between the employment status of mothers with a baby of less than twelvemonths, and that of mothers whose children were just over one year old. Their

findings suggest that the employment status of mothers with new babies may not necessarily be typical of subsequent patterns. For example, whilst just 17.0% of mothers with new babies (less than twelve months old) were in part-time employment, the proportion of mothers working part-time rose to 27.0% for those with one-year old children.

Bearing this in mind, it is possible that a number of women, reported in this study to be returning to full-time employment following maternity leave, will quite soon discover the difficulties of coping with a young child and a full-time job, and so will opt for part-time employment, possibly through a change of job, thereby also perhaps experiencing downward occupational mobility. A further number will perhaps decide upon a complete (temporary) withdrawal from the labour force.

On reflection then, there were aspects of both the sample achieved and the research design, which suggest a need for caution in generalising from the findings of this study, and which might usefully be reappraised in contemplating further research in this area.

Nor was the study entirely successful in its overall aim of establishing why some women return to employment following maternity leave while others do not. As discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 and summarised in the "Findings" above, a number of factors were found to be of significance for mothers' employment decisions. In the majority of cases, some eighty-four percent of those surveyed, a combination of high earnings potential, availability of childcare, and a partner who shared the parenting role, did seem to indicate the likelihood of a return to work. The findings did confirm, however, the complexity of the issues involved, for, amongst the mothers in this sample there was a

substantial number, some thirty-two women, whose decision to continue in employment or not, could not be explained by this, or indeed any, combination of the factors considered in the study. In some cases there was no apparent explanation as to why a woman made a particular decision. In others, women claimed that their decisions had been influenced by factors other than those put forward in the hypotheses investigated by this study. These included factors such as: the perceived stresses of combining motherhood and employment; dissatisfaction with NHS reforms; a belief in the virtues and values of full-time motherhood; and an enhanced perception of the value of their earnings to the welfare of the household. From these findings, on reflection, it may have been more rewarding to investigate the significance of factors such as "stress" or "ideologies of motherhood", rather than "household financial management", for example, which proved to be of little significance for the decision-making process.

It might be concluded then that the study succeeded in its aim of exploring the complexity of women's employment decisions, and the ways in which various influences combine in order to produce a particular outcome, ie. a return or non-return to employment following maternity leave. From the findings it is possible to state, with some confidence, that a woman who is a high earner, to whom suitable and affordable childcare is available, and whose partner shares in the care of his child, will be likely to continue in employment following childbirth. The study did not, however, succeed in providing from the hypotheses investigated, a definitive explanation of why some women continue in employment while others do not. Such an explanation would perhaps remain elusive, whatever the range of factors included for consideration, since women are a heterogeneous population, individuals with individual preferences, aptitudes and ambitions, who are the authors and agents of their own lives, thus defying any attempt

at neat packaging into returner and non-returner categories.

Despite such provisos, however, it is clear from the findings of this study that a number of factors, when acting in combination, do exert sufficient influence upon employment decisions to substantially increase the likelihood of a return to work following maternity leave. Such factors are worthy of further attention by those committed to the goal of improving women's labour market participation. Hence we now turn to a consideration of the policy options which may provide an appropriate response to the findings of this study.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It was acknowledged above that the rationale for this study is rooted in the premise that an increase in labour market participation amongst mothers of young children would be a desirable policy goal. The benefits which continuity of employment may offer for individuals and for employers have been well documented. Joshi (1987) and Joshi and Davies (1993), have graphically illustrated the effects of continuity of employment for women's life-time earnings potential. Ginn and Arber (1993), have demonstrated the even longer-term effects in terms of pension entitlements and financial well-being in old age. The NHS Management Executive (1992) has added its voice to that of others, in particular public sector employers, in decrying the loss to organisations, and to the economy as a whole, of highly skilled and expensively trained women who, having taken substantial breaks from employment, often return to jobs which do not fully utilise their experience and expertise. Less widely acclaimed, but no less significant, however, are the potential benefits for the wider society which may stem from an increase in women's,

and in particular, mothers', participation in the labour market

Issues of Inequality

Since the late 1980s, in particular, the gap has widened in the financial circumstances of families with children. Today, in Northern Ireland, as in other regions of the UK, there is a substantial polarisation in terms of income. Those differing financial circumstances are largely related to the employment position of adults within households. In a society with a growing number of dual-earner households, one-earner households are at an increasing financial disadvantage. The Family Expenditure Survey provides some indication of this relative disadvantage, comparing household income for four groups of "couple" households, two with children and two without. Whilst the group with the lowest income consists of couples with children and the mother economically inactive, households with children and both parents economically active had a higher average income than even childless couples with one economically active adult (FES, Central Statistical Office 1991, Table 21).

Within this general picture of the relationship between employment and family income, parental employment status has particularly acute and serious effects on the economic position of many families. A recent review (Kumar 1993) suggests that the risk of living in poverty is highest for children living in families with one or more unemployed adults.

The findings of this study suggest that women with high earnings potential are most likely to continue in employment following the birth of a child. This supports other analyses

(eg. Humphries and Rubery 1992) which have shown that the changes in women's labour force participation over the past decade have not been uniform. The labour market integration of particular groups of mothers, most notably better educated women in highly paid jobs, has led to increased differentiation among mothers. At one end of the spectrum are full-time employed mothers in higher status jobs, while at the other end there is a large pool of mothers, either not in employment, or in part-time employment, much of which is characterised by low pay, short hours, lack of security and poor conditions of employment. This differentiation among mothers is at the same time leading to a polarisation of households. Because partnerships and marriage are more likely to occur within, rather than across, socio-economic groups, the growing number of full-time continuously employed women, who are in partnerships, contributes to a growing cadre of high status, high qualified and high income households. At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum there is an increasing proportion of no-earner households, dependent on state benefits, bringing up children on low incomes. In between is a group of households with only one earner, or with two earners, one of whom is contributing little financially due to working very short hours in a low paid job.

The subject of parental employment is therefore deserving of greater consideration than it currently attracts when marginalised as a "women's issue". Enabling both men and women to successfully combine parenthood and employment may well have wider implications for the well-being of society in general, as well as for individuals and family units.

If it is to be concluded from the above that the increased participation of mothers in the labour market is indeed a desirable goal, how then might that goal be attained; what are

the social policy implications, and what policy instruments might be utilised in its attainment?

POLICY RESPONSES

The findings of the present study suggest that mothers will be more likely to continue in employment following childbirth if they are high earners, if fathers are involved in parenting, and if suitable and affordable childcare is available. It therefore seems reasonable to hypothesise that: *if women's earnings potential can be improved; if men can be encouraged and enabled to play a fuller role in parenting; and if childcare can be made more readily available, then more women will participate in the labour market on a more continuous basis.*

How then might each of these "sub-goals" be achieved in order to attain the overall goal of greater labour market participation, and what might be the policy instruments appropriate to their attainment?

Earnings

The findings of this study and of others (eg. Harrop and Moss 1995, Waldfogel 1993), suggest that high earning women are likely to continue in employment following childbirth. Unfortunately for the purpose of enhancing labour market participation women in the UK are more likely to be low, rather than high, earners. Women in general earn less than men and that has not changed greatly, despite improved educational attainments and more than twenty years of Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination legislation. In both Britain and Northern Ireland the gap between women's and men's pay persists

across all industrial sectors and occupational groups. In Britain in 1995 female earnings were 73% of male earnings in manual occupations, and 68% of male earnings in non-manual occupations. (New Earnings Survey). In Northern Ireland 68% of women were earning less than £150 per week and only 7% were earning more than £300 per week. (EOCNI 1995). The factors underlying women's poor earnings performance have been the subject of much debate (see Joshi 1992, Lonsdale 1992, Hakim 1996), and in order to explore the means by which earnings potential might be enhanced, and thus labour market participation increased, it is perhaps useful to summarise some of the most significant influences upon women's ability to earn.

It is somewhat simplistic to state baldly that men and women do different jobs, and jobs at different levels, and that women tend to be concentrated in lower paid and lower status jobs. Occupational segregation does, however, persist in the labour market. Whilst horizontal segregation has declined over the past two decades, women are still more likely to work only with other women and to be concentrated in a narrow range of "women's" occupations. Nearly a quarter of all women in employment in Northern Ireland, for example, work in catering, cleaning and hairdressing, and 29% work in clerical and related occupations, most of which are notoriously poorly paid (EOCNI 1995). Vertical segregation is even more of a problem, however, and even when women do work in the same occupations as men they tend to work on different grades and at lower levels. Even in occupational groups (such as those in the present study) where women form the majority of employees, for example in associate professional occupations, such as nursing, clerical work and sales, women's pay levels are less than men's, at just under 80%, 85% and 56% respectively (New Earnings Survey (NI) 1994).

The reasons for occupational segregation, both horizontal and vertical, are complex and in many cases historical. and their explanation is, in any case, largely beyond the scope of the current study. Joshi (1992) however, usefully summarises a number of the factors contributing to women's poor earnings performance, many of which are associated with the costs of caring and are thus especially relevant in the present context. Broadly, the "reasons" for women's poor earnings are related to:

- the hours worked. Nearly half of all women employed in the UK are part-time workers.
- downward mobility. Many women take jobs which are at a lower level, and less well paid, than those which they are qualified to do in order to fit in with their caring role.
- discontinuous employment histories. The market rewards accumulated employment experience, and penalises workers, mainly women, with interrupted employment records. Continuous service, in particular in large organisations, also affords opportunities for earning increments and promotion within, and between, occupational grades. Women often cannot avail of such opportunities because of discontinuous service records.

Hence the "reasons" for women's low earnings potential may seem relatively clear, but what, if anything, can be done to change the situation, and thereby help to improve women's labour market participation? In all the above there is something of an element of "Catch 22". For example, women have low earnings due to discontinuous employment histories, and conversely women are discouraged from remaining

continuously in employment by their low earnings potential. Moves could be made, however, to break into that circle by the introduction of devices such as more flexible employment practices, better childcare provision, and changes in workplace culture. Such measures, whilst not in themselves improving earnings, could nonetheless encourage women to remain in employment, thereby eventually improving their "human capital" value to employers and in that way raising earnings potential. The downward mobility problem, whereby women accept a downgrading or a move to a less well-paid job, in order to obtain greater flexibility or more suitable working hours, was evidenced in the findings of this study. A frequently voiced concern was that, in order to secure reduced or flexible hours of work, it would be necessary to relinquish seniority and revert to a basic grade. Employers could do much to prevent this by removing "grade bars" on flexibility and by providing "family-friendly" conditions of employment for employees at all levels.

Women working on a part-time basis are clearly unable to earn as much as those doing a full-time job. Yet it is clear from the comments of women in this study, as in others, that, despite its many disadvantages, part-time work holds much appeal for those who, in the absence of more fundamental social changes regarding the gendering of care, see no other way of alleviating the dual burden of employment and domestic responsibilities. The problem again arises, however, that a move to part-time work is often accompanied by a downward move to a lower-graded and lower paid job. Hence many women, when faced with both a reduction in hours and down grading, conclude that it is no longer financially worth while to continue in employment. Employers, by increasing flexibility and allowing part-time work or job-sharing at all levels, might go some way towards breaking the cycle of association between part-time work and jobs at the bottom of the

career ladder, which tend to be those least attractive both financially and in terms of the intrinsic rewards offered.

The challenge inherent in attempts to improve women's earnings potential should not be underestimated, given the historical and social context for the present situation. Measures such as those suggested above, might improve the position, however, and with it the likelihood of mothers continuing in employment.

But earnings were not the only factor of significance in women's employment decisions following maternity leave. Indeed when the earnings factor is viewed in isolation it seems that in this study a number of high earning women did not intend to continue in employment while a substantial number of low earners did intend to return to work. The discriminant analysis carried out on the data, and discussed in Chapter 6, suggests that the likelihood of a woman continuing in employment is greatest in circumstances where high earnings potential interacts with other factors, one of which is the degree to which her partner shares in the care of their child.

Sharing in Parenting

There is a view, particularly prevalent perhaps in the UK, that the ways in which couples manage their relationships, and the duties and responsibilities of parenthood, is very much a private matter, in which policy-makers have no rightful part to play. Evidence from this study, and from others, would suggest however, that there has been little change in the gendering of care and in the sharing of childcare and domestic labour, despite the changes which have taken place in women's labour market participation over recent years. Hence there is perhaps just cause for concern to be expressed, in the form

of social policy measures, if the tensions, conflicts and potential breakdown of relationships, observed elsewhere as the likely outcome of a failure to respond to change, (Hochschild, 1989) are to be minimised in this society. Policy responses are demanded also if, to quote the European Council Recommendations on Childcare (EC 1991 Article 6), we are to "promote and encourage, with due respect for the freedom of the individual, increased participation by men in order to achieve a more equal sharing of parental responsibilities between men and women, and to enable women to have a more effective role in the labour market".

One measure, which might in itself encourage greater involvement in parenting, would be a reduction in working hours for men in the UK, who currently spend longer hours in waged work, and hence more time away from their homes and families, than any others in the European Union. That apart, other measures might include the introduction of Statutory Paternity Leave. Just over half of the fathers in this study were said to have taken time off work around the time of their child's birth, and most had been forced to take holidays or unpaid leave, none of which is conducive to encouraging men to become involved in the care of their child. Other measures with the potential to promote more equal sharing of parental responsibilities have been introduced in other European countries. In Sweden, for example, benefits are available to cover wage replacement for either parent for a period of time after the birth of a child, and either or both parents have the right to return to reduced hours working, in either their former position or equivalent. Such measures might be used in the UK also, as instruments to encourage greater involvement of men with their children, and, as the findings of this study would suggest, potentially greater labour market participation amongst mothers.

Childcare

The third element in the "package" of factors, suggested by the findings of this study as instrumental in encouraging greater labour market participation amongst mothers, is suitable and affordable childcare. No mother with a preschool child can return to work without arranging some form of childcare. Whilst the evidence would suggest that availability of childcare is a necessary, rather than sufficient, condition of mothers' labour market participation, the findings do suggest that a lack of suitable and affordable childcare will inhibit a woman's ability to continue in employment following maternity leave. Evidence from countries, such as France, where publicly funded childcare is widely available, also suggests that it is a factor of some significance for women's labour market participation. Hence it seems likely that a greater availability of childcare, funded or subsidised by government, employers, or both, would be of assistance in encouraging women to remain in employment. Nearly three-quarters (72.3%) of the women interviewed for this study said they would be interested in using a workplace creche or day nursery, and more than half said they would find such a facility useful, even if they had to pay for its use.

In proposing measures for childcare, however, it is again important to take account of individual preferences. Of those who wish to continue in employment, there will be some who would not be prepared to accept either publicly provided childcare or a place in a workplace nursery. A report of the Survey of British Social Attitudes suggests that a substantial number of women would not regard any form of childcare, other than that provided by their partner or a close relative, as suitable or acceptable (Thomson, 1995).

Clearly the supply of such childcare is not inexhaustible and if there are women who will

not return to work unless they have their preferred form of childcare, then no amount of childcare subsidy or workplace provision will make a difference to them. However, the issue of childcare provision should not be viewed in isolation from other factors with the potential to increase women's labour market participation, and in particular from family-friendly employment practices. Employers may well be able to encourage even those women with a strong preference for family care to return to work by a greater flexibility in working hours, which would enable women to work at those times when their partner or a relative would be available to care for the child. A number of women, in particular nurses, in the present study said that they would only continue in employment following maternity leave if they could work nights or weekends, when their partner could care for the child. Some had already established that this degree of flexibility would not be afforded by their present employer and so intended to resign, possibly seeking alternative employment, at a later date, in the private nursing home sector, where it was claimed, more suitable hours were available.

Even when individual preferences are taken into account then, it seems possible that with goodwill and a little creative thinking, acceptable childcare could be provided to meet the needs of more mothers who might thereby be encouraged to continue in employment following maternity leave.

Costs and Benefits

While the initial public expenditure costs of much that has been suggested above would be high, it is likely that, in the medium term, the flowback to government from a reduction in social security payments, and increased revenue from direct and indirect taxation, arising from employment, would exceed the cost of state subsidies. (Joshi and

Davies 1993). The funding implications of such measures are real, and cannot be denied, however, the benefits of enabling more families to share in the economic wealth of the nation, becoming more self-sufficient, through increased participation in the labour market, likewise should not be ignored.

FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study has, it is hoped, contributed some new information, and some greater understanding, to the body of knowledge about motherhood and employment.

Despite that contribution, however, our knowledge remains incomplete, and so it seems proper to conclude with some suggestions regarding directions for further research in this general area.

Preferences and Circumstances

This study provides further evidence of a trend, noted since the 1980s, towards women continuing in employment following the birth of a child. It has also demonstrated that the presence of a particular combination of factors will, in many cases, increase the likelihood of a return to work.

Where it has not succeeded, however, is in providing a definitive answer to the question of how much "real choice" is available to women in deciding to pursue either an employment career, or a career as mother and homemaker.

Some of those interviewed, both "returners" and "non-returners" clearly felt that they had

been "free to choose" and their experiences would seem to provide a degree of support for the Hakim (1996) claim that "modern industrial society creates the conditions for women to make genuine choices between two polarised lifestyles" (p.215). Others, however, had made their "choice" in circumstances more accurately reflected by the counter argument from Ginn et al (1996) which suggests that "where women state a preference ...this must be understood in the context of demands on their time and childcare costs which limit their employment options" (p.169).

So the debate continues, in academic journal and popular press alike, but further research is clearly needed if we are to establish, with any degree of certainty, the role which preference has to play, vis a vis circumstance, in women's employment decisions, and the relative importance of each. If personal preferences do have a major role to play though, and if women are to be afforded "real" choices, then one cannot disagree with Hakim's (1996) thesis that "public policy has to allow both options" (for employment or homemaking) (p.213) and a package of measures is required which will take account of parental choices and personal preferences in parenting and employment. For this proposal to be translated from the realms of utopia into practical action, however, as a first step, research is also needed to fully evaluate the costs and benefits of a range of public policy and employment options, and hence to determine the most appropriate and most cost-effective mix of policies.

Family-Friendly Employment

Brewster et al (1993) have claimed that, although the standard, nine to five, five days a week permanent employment contract was never universal, what has happened recently is that the growth in other patterns of work has reached the position in the UK where

only a minority of the working population has such contracts. Despite this perceived spread of flexible work practices, and the relevance of such practices to family responsibilities, there is little current comprehensive and reliable information on the extent and nature of flexible working arrangements among men and women with caring responsibilities - with the possible exception of part-time working. Much of the available data on "flexible" practices comes from surveys of employers (eg. Equal Opportunities Review 1995). These vary in scope and representativeness and the perspective is more usually that of employers rather than employees. The findings of the present study would also suggest that, even where policies such as job-sharing, reduced hours and flexible working do exist, there may be problems of awareness and take-up. Thus, work is needed to investigate the constraints upon, and facilitators of, take-up, and the effectiveness of such practices. Most notably, and reflecting concerns expressed in this study, research is needed into the effects of workplace culture, and other mediating influences, such as the gendering of caring, and the effects on promotion, pay and pensions, on the practice of flexible and family-friendly employment.

Fathers in Employment - Effects of the Dual-Earner Lifestyle

A significant gap in the research on family life and employment relates to the lack of attention given to paternal employment. In the ideology of parenthood dominant in the United Kingdom paternal employment tends to be viewed as a given feature of family life. It seems to attract interest only if men are unable to "provide" for their families through unemployment or low pay. Hence little information is available on men's patterns of employment, other than recent work on core and peripheral workforces, and still less on how men's working lives are affected by the transition to fatherhood.

Increasingly, however, male employment takes place in the context of dual-earner households, with two adults in full-time employment, and the necessity, if nothing else, to share in household and caring responsibilities.

The responses of women in this study suggest that, although the dominant ideologies may remain, the practicalities of parenthood in a dual-earner household may well have implications for men's working lives. More than half of the women who planned to return to work claimed that their partner would be sharing equally in the care of their child. For a number of women indeed the child's father would be their main source of childcare, or the key component in a combination of childcare arrangements. This was usually because of the nature of his work, for example, a number were farmers working in or around home; or because of his employment pattern, as a shift-worker for example, or an academic with a degree of flexibility in his working life.

From evidence such as this, more interest in, and attention to, paternal employment seems warranted, from a number of perspectives. It would be of interest for example to establish how the potential for flexibility and restructuring of male employment might impact upon responsibilities for parenting. Equally important, however, would be the possibility of research into paternal employment laying the foundations for a broader study of the effects of the dual-earner lifestyle upon the workplace.

Whilst work has been undertaken to explore the impact which the dual-earner lifestyle may have upon family life and relationships (eg Hochschild 1989, Brannen and Moss 1991), little attention has, as yet, been focused upon the effects which an increasing condensation of both caring and employment into a short period of the lifecycle -

typically between twenty five and fifty and resulting from a trend towards prolongation of education and towards earlier withdrawal from the labour market, through early retirement and redundancy - may have upon the workplace, in terms of behaviour at work. There has been little research of this type indeed, since the Goldthorpe studies of the 1960s. But it seems inevitable that a combination of work and family responsibilities will impact upon aspects of employment, such as, productivity, motivation and job satisfaction, attendance, absenteeism, timekeeping and turnover, for both men and women, as more and more individuals live in dual-earner households, in which some degree of sharing is required in order to cope with caring and domestic tasks.

In Conclusion

This study of women's employment decisions following maternity leave has been mindful of the thesis that "working women are a heterogenous (population)", which may well "comprise ...qualitatively different groups" (Hakim 1991, p.113). It has also shared the view that "women are (indeed) responsible adults who make real choices and are the authors and agents of their own lives" (Hakim 1991 p.186). It was no surprise, therefore, to find that some women, on making the transition to motherhood, had decided to continue in employment, while others had decided to leave the labour market. Nonetheless, in stressing the complexity of those decisions, the study has also sought to display an awareness of McCrate's (1988) stricture that "women (may) choose to learn to prefer mothering over auto mechanics for the same reason that one would choose to learn to enjoy winter rather than summer sports in a cold climate" (p.237). It has thereby, hopefully, avoided the trap of "reading preferences into outcomes without considering how circumstances frame preferences" (Bruegel, 1996, p.177).

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CRAIGAVON
AREA HOSPITAL
GROUP TRUST

Caring Through Commitment

Mrs
Old Kilmore Road
LURGAN
Co Armagh

Dear

Craigavon Area Hospital Group Trust have agreed to participate in a research project instigated by the University of Ulster. The aim of the project is to look at the factors which influence womens' employment decisions following maternity.

The Trust is keen to co-operate with this research as we wish to facilitate women wishing to return to work.

As this project will involve completing a questionnaire, Mrs Carol Ackah of the University of Ulster has asked the Trust to provide names of staff currently on maternity leave. Providing you have no objections to your name and address being disclosed to her, Mrs Ackah will write to you asking if you would be willing to participate in the study.

If you do not wish this information to be communicated to Mrs Ackah, I would request that you contact myself at the Human Resources Department (0762) 334444 on extension 2719.

Thank you for your co-operation on this matter and do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely

M. Mullen

pp. ROBBIE McGREEVY
Human Resource Planner

HUMAN RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT

Firbank House
Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust
68 Lurgan Road, Portadown
Craigavon, BT63 5QQ
Telephone: (0762) 334444
Fax: (0762) 394041



UNIVERSITY of
ULSTER
at JORDANSTOWN

Newtownabbey

County Antrim

BT37 0QB

Northern Ireland

Telephone: Belfast (01 232) 365131

Dear

I am leading a University of Ulster research project looking at the factors which influence women's employment decisions following maternity leave. Nearly half of all mothers now return to work within about eight months of childbirth and we are interested in finding out why they do so-is it for purely financial reasons, or because they want a career, or quite simply because attitudes towards work and working mothers have changed dramatically over the past 10 years? We are also interested in how more women might be assisted to return to work, perhaps through more available and affordable childcare or more "family friendly" employment practices.

Your employer, Craigavon Area Hospitals Group Trust, has agreed to cooperate in this research because it is keen to ensure that everything possible is being done to facilitate women wishing to return to work. I have been given the names of women who are currently on Maternity Leave from the Trust and as you are one such I am writing to ask if you would be prepared to take part in this project and to answer a questionnaire with either myself or a member of the Trust's Human Resources Department- this would take about 45 minutes and we would ofcourse arrange the meeting at a mutually convenient time and place. Your name would not appear on the questionnaire nor in any report and I can assure you of complete confidentiality regarding your responses.

I would be grateful if you would complete the enclosed slip and return it, in the prepaid envelope, to me at the University of Ulster.

Yours sincerely

Carol Ackah
Lecturer in Human Resource Management

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS FOLLOWING MATERNITY LEAVE

NOTE TO INTERVIEWERS

Please explain from guidance notes the purpose of the survey and the ways in which it may help policymaking and planning for women in employment. Stress that it is not being conducted by their employer or former employer; it is entirely voluntary - if there is any question that they don't want to answer, or feel doesn't apply to them they should let you know and you will move on to the next question or section. The interview should take about 45 minutes. Thank them for taking time to help with the survey.

oOo oOo oOo

SECTION A

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is your age group?

Under 21

☐ 1

21 - 25

☐ 2

26 - 30

☐ 3

31 - 35

☒ 4

Over 35

☐ 5

2. How long have you been on Maternity Leave?

Less than 13 weeks

☐ 1

13 weeks

☐ 2

14 weeks

☐ 3

15 weeks

☐ 4

16 weeks

☒ 5

17 weeks

☐ 6

18 weeks

☐ 7

3. How old is your baby?

Less than 4 weeks

☐ 1

4 weeks

☐ 2

5 weeks

☐ 3

6 weeks

☐ 4

7 weeks

☐ 5

8 weeks

☐ 6

More than 8 weeks

☒ 7

4. How many children do you have?

1

☒ 1

2

☐ 2

3

☐ 3

4

☐ 4

5+

☐ 5

Col 7

5. Have you had any previous Maternity Leave while working at Craigavon Hospital?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Col 8

6. Are you going back to work after your Maternity Leave?

Yes

☒ 1

No

☐ 2

Don't Know

☐ 3

Col 9

IF YES → CONTINUE
IF NO OR DON'T KNOW GO TO SECTION B

7. Are you going back?

Full-time

☒ 1

Part-time

☐ 2

Job Sharing

☐ 3

Don't Know/Haven't Decided

☐ 4

Col 10

SECTION B

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

SHOW CARD B1

8. What is your highest educational qualification?

- | | |
|---|--|
| GCSE | <input type="checkbox"/> 01 |
| GCE 'A' level | <input type="checkbox"/> 02 |
| Youth Training Certificate | <input type="checkbox"/> 03 |
| Clerical & Commercial/Secretarial Qualification (RSA etc) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 04 |
| City & Guilds Certificate | <input type="checkbox"/> 05 |
| ONC, OND, BTEC | <input type="checkbox"/> 06 |
| HNC, HND, BTEC Higher | <input type="checkbox"/> 07 |
| NVQ | <input type="checkbox"/> 08 |
| University Degree | <input type="checkbox"/> 09 |
| No educational qualification | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |

Cols 11/

SHOW CARD B2

9. What is your highest professional qualification?

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| SEN | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| SRN | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| RGN | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| RMN | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 |
| Teaching qualification | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| Social work qualification | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 |
| Professional Diploma or Certificate
(eg Physiotherapy, Radiography, or Personnel Management,
Accountancy etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 |
| Membership/Fellowship of Royal College | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 |
| No professional qualification | <input type="checkbox"/> 9 |

Col 13

10. In the past year have you been on any training courses?

Yes

☒ 1

No

☐ 2

Col 14

IF YES → CONTINUE
IF NO GO TO SECTION C

11. What in your opinion was the main purpose of the training?

To help you do your job better

☒ 1

To prepare you for promotion

☐ 2

To implement changes in technology and/or work practices

☐ 3

Col 15

SECTION C

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY AND FUTURE

12. How many jobs have you had in the last five years?

1

☒ 1

2

☐ 2

3

☐ 3

4

☐ 4

5+

☐ 5

Col 16

13. How long altogether had you worked in Health and Social Services before you went on Maternity Leave?

Less than 26 weeks

☐ 1

26 weeks but less than 1 year

☐ 2

1 year but less than 2 years

☐ 3

2 years but less than 5 years

☐ 4

5 years but less than 10 years

☐ 5

More than 10 years

☒ 6

Col 17

14. What was your job before you went on Maternity Leave?

Title or brief outline

Enrolled Nurse

18

15. Have you been promoted in Health and Social Services in the past 2 years?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Not applicable

☐ 3

Col 19

16. If you go back to work would you hope to be promoted within the next 2 years?

Yes

☒ 1

No

☐ 2

Col 20

(Note to Interviewer - Questions 17-19 only to non-returners)

17. Although you are not going back to work after Maternity Leave do you anticipate going back to work anywhere at some time in the future?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☐ 2

Don't Know

☐ 3

Col 21

IF YES → CONTINUE
IF NO OR DON'T KNOW GO TO SECTION D

18. Would you go back to work in Health and Social Services?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☐ 2

Col 22

IF YES → CONTINUE
IF NO GO TO SECTION D

19. When do you think you might go back to work in Health & Social Services?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Within 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| Within 2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| Within 5 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| Within 10 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 |
| When the children are all at school | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 |

Col 23

SECTION D

PERSONAL FINANCES

20. Were you paid weekly or monthly before you went on Maternity Leave?

- | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|
| Weekly | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 |
| Monthly | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 |

Col 24

SHOW CARD D1

21. If paid weekly what was your weekly take home pay?

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Per Week £</i> | |
| Up to £50 | <input type="checkbox"/> 01 |
| 51 - 75 | <input type="checkbox"/> 02 |
| 76 - 100 | <input type="checkbox"/> 03 |
| 101 - 125 | <input type="checkbox"/> 04 |
| 126 - 150 | <input type="checkbox"/> 05 |
| 151 - 175 | <input type="checkbox"/> 06 |
| 176 - 200 | <input type="checkbox"/> 07 |
| 201 - 250 | <input type="checkbox"/> 08 |
| 251 - 300 | <input type="checkbox"/> 09 |
| Over 300 | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 |

Col 25/2

22. If paid monthly what was your monthly take home pay?

Per Month £

Up to £200

☐ 01

201 - 300

☐ 02

301 - 400

☐ 03

401 - 500

☐ 04

501 - 600

☐ 05

601 - 700

☒ 06

Cols 27

701 - 800

☐ 07

801 - 1000

☐ 08

1001 - 1500

☐ 09

Over 1500

☐ 10

SHOW CARD D2

23. What was your pay mainly used for before you went on Maternity Leave? (*Rank top 3 in order of importance, 1 being most important*)

Rent/Mortgage

☒ 1

Col 29

Food

☐

Col 30

Fuel for heating, cooking etc

☒ 2

Col 31

Telephone

☐

Col 32

Clothing and Shoes (Self)

☐

Col 33

Clothing and Shoes (Husband & family)

☐

Col 34

Car expenses

☒ 3

Col 35

Repairs/decorating

☐

Col 36

Holidays and/or meals/nights out

☐

Col 37

Personal spending

☐

Col 38

Savings and Insurances

☐

Col 39

SECTION E

HUSBAND/PARTNERS EMPLOYMENT & HOUSEHOLD FINANCES

24. Is your husband presently employed?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Col 40

IF UNEMPLOYED → GO TO 27
IF EMPLOYED → CONTINUE

25. What is your husband's present job?

Title or brief description

.....

☒ 41

26. How long has he been with that employer (or self-employed)?

Less than 26 weeks

☐ 1

26 weeks but less than 1 year

☐ 2

1 year but less than 2 years

☐ 3

2 years but less than 5 years

☐ 4

5 years but less than 10 years

☐ 5

10 years +

☐ 6

Col 42

27. How many different employers has he had in the past 5 years?

1

☐ 1

2

☒ 2

3

☐ 3

4

☐ 4

5+

☐ 5

Don't know

☐ 6

Col 43

28. Has your husband been unemployed in the past 5 years?

Yes

☒ 1

No

☐ 2

Col 44

29. If he is unemployed at present when did he last work?

Within the past 12 months

☒ 1

More than 1 year ago

☐ 2

Col 45

SHOW CARD E1

(Note to Interviewer: If husband/partner unemployed ask interviewee to apply to when he last worked if possible)

30. Is your husband paid weekly or monthly?

Weekly

☒ 1

Monthly

☐ 2

Col 46

31. If weekly, what is your husband's weekly take-home pay?

Per Week £

Up to £100

☐ 01

101 - 125

☐ 02

126 - 150

☐ 03

151 - 175

☐ 04

176 - 200

☒ 05

201 - 225

☐ 06

226 - 250

☐ 07

251 - 300

☐ 08

301 - 350

☐ 09

Over 350

☐ 10

Don't know

☐ 11

Cols 47

32. If monthly, what is your husband's monthly take-home pay?

Per Month £

Up to £400

☐ 01

401 - 500

☐ 02

501 - 600

☐ 03

601 - 700

☐ 04

701 - 800

☐ 05

801 - 900

☐ 06

901 - 1000

☐ 07

1001 - 1500

☐ 08

1501 - 2000

☐ 09

Over 2000

☐ 10

Don't know

☐ 11

Cols 49

SHOW CARD E2

33. These are some of the ways in which people organise their household finances. Which of them comes closest to the way you and your husband/partner organised things before you went on Maternity Leave?

I looked after all the household money except his personal spending money

☒ 1

He looked after all the household money except my personal spending money

☐ 2

He looked after all the household money and gave me a housekeeping allowance

☐ 3

We pooled our money and managed the household finances jointly

☐ 4

We kept our finances completely separate

☐ 5

Some other arrangement (specify)

☐ 6

Col 51

(Note to interviewer: 34 only to non-returners)

34. Will you still organise your household finances the same way now that you're only going to have one income coming in?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☐ 2

Don't Know

☐ 3

Col 52

IF YES OR DON'T KNOW → GO TO 36
IF NO → CONTINUE

SHOW CARD E3

35. If you think you will change the way your household finances are organised which one of the following comes closest to the way you plan to organise things?

I will look after all the household money except
his personal spending money

☐ 1

He will look after all the household money except
my personal spending money

☐ 2

He will look after all the household money and give
me a housekeeping allowance

☐ 3

Col 53

We will manage the household finances jointly

☐ 4

We will keep our finances completely separate

☐ 5

Some other arrangement (specify)

☐ 6

36. Do you have a joint bank or building society account with your husband/partner?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Col 54

SHOW CARD E4

(Note to interviewer: 37 to returners only)

37. What will your pay mainly be used for when you go back to work?
(Rank top 3 in order of importance, 1 being most important).

Rent/Mortgage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Col 55
Food	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 56
Fuel for heating, cooking etc	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Col 57
Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 58
Clothing and Shoes (Self)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 59
Clothing and Shoes (Husband & family)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 60
Car expenses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Col 61
Repairs/decorating	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 62
Holidays and/or meals/nights out	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 63
Personal spending	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 64
Savings and Insurances	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 65
Childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 66

SECTION F

ATTITUDES TO WOMEN AND WORK

(Note to Interviewer: Read out the following)

People's views about whether a woman ought to work or not vary. I am going to read out a number of statements about this - can you please tell me whether you agree, disagree or don't have any views.

38. A married woman with no children should go out to work.

Agree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	
Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	Col 67
Neither Agree or Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	

39. A married woman with children under school age should go out to work.

Agree

☐ 1

Disagree

☒ 2

Col 68

Neither Agree or Disagree

☐ 3

40. A married woman with children all at school should go out to work.

Agree

☐ 1

Disagree

☐ 2

Col 69

Neither Agree or Disagree

☒ 3

41. Women should have completely equal opportunities for getting jobs and promotion as men.

Agree

☒ 1

Disagree

☐ 2

Col 70

Neither Agree or Disagree

☐ 3

I would like to find out something about your husband's or partner's views on women working. Could you tell me what you think his views might be about the following statements:

42. A married woman with no children, should go out to work.

Agrees

☒ 1

Disagrees

☐ 2

Col 71

Neither Agrees or Disagrees

☐ 3

43. A married woman with children under school age should go out to work.

Agrees

☐ 1

Disagrees

☒ 2

Col 72

Neither Agrees or Disagrees

☐ 3

44. A married woman with children all at school should go out to work.

Agrees

☐ 1

Disagrees

☐ 2

Neither Agrees or Disagrees

☒ 3

Col 73

I'd like to try to find out something about what you think that your husband's or partner's attitude is toward you going out to work.

SHOW CARD F1

45. What would you say your husband's attitude to your job was before you went on Maternity Leave?

It was necessary for household finances

☒ 1

It was useful for money for extras

☐ 2

It gave you something to do until you had a family

☐ 3

It gave you satisfaction and a sense of identity

☐ 4

It made use of your education and/or training

☐ 5

Work is the normal thing to do

☐ 6

Col 74

46. Who made the decision about you going back to work, or not after Maternity Leave?

Yourself

☒ 1

Jointly with partner

☐ 2

Partner

☐ 3

Col 75

47. Did you discuss the decision with your partner?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Col 76

48. If yes, what were his views?

Should go back

☐ 1

Should not go back

☐ 2

It's up to you

☐ 3

It's up to you - but with conditions e.g. must find good childcare, must not neglect household etc.

☐ 4

Col 77

SECTION G

ATTITUDES TO WORK

(Note to Interviewer - Read out following)

In this section I'd like to find out something about your own attitudes to work.

SHOW CARD G1

49. These are some of the reasons people give for wanting to go out to work. Can you tell me which of those reasons was most important to you when you were working? Rank them 1-7, 1 being most important and 7 least important.

Work is the normal thing to do

☒ 1

Col 5

To pay for essentials

☒ 2

Col 6

To pay for extras

☒ 3

Col 7

To have money of my own

☒ 7

Col 8

For company

☒ 6

Col 9

Enjoy the work itself

☒ 5

Col 10

To make use of training

☒ 4

Col 11

50. Have your feelings about your job changed since you had the baby?

Yes

☒ 1

No

☐ 2

Col 12

51. Do you now feel that your job is?

Less important

☒ 1

More important

☐ 2

Just as important as before

☐ 3

Col 13

SECTION H

SHARING DOMESTIC WORK AND CHILDCARE

52. If you think about all the jobs that need to be done to keep a home running such as cleaning, laundry, cooking and shopping, how are these shared between you and your husband/partner?

Do all of it yourself

☐ 1

Do most of it yourself

☐ 2

Share equally

☒ 3

Husband/partner does most of it

☐ 4

Husband/partner does all of it

☐ 5

We employ someone to do it

☐ 6

Col 14

53. Has the sharing of domestic work changed since you had the baby?
Is there -

More sharing

☒ 1

Less sharing

☐ 2

Stayed the same

☐ 3

Col 15

54. How do you and your husband/partner share in looking after the baby?

Almost entirely yourself

☐ 1

Do most of it yourself

☒ 2

Share equally

☐ 3

Husband does most of it

☐ 4

Husband does all of it

☐ 5

Col 16

55. If you go back to work how will looking after the baby be shared (other than formal childcare)?

Almost entirely yourself

☐ 1

Mostly yourself

☐ 2

Mostly husband/partner

☐ 3

Shared equally

☒ 4

Col 17

SECTION I

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Thinking about the job you worked in before going on Maternity Leave:

56. Were you allowed to choose the time to start and finish (flexitime) or did you have to work a set day or shift?

Set day

☐ 1

Flexi

☐ 2

Shift

☒ 3

Col 18

57. Did your employer allow job-sharing for your type of job or your grade?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Don't know

☐ 3

Col 19

58. Did your employer allow part-time working for your type of job or your grade?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Don't know

☐ 3

Col 20

59. Would job-sharing or part-time working be a practical or feasible option for you in terms of income?
- Yes ☐ 1
- No ☒ 2 Col 21
60. Did your employer have a parental leave scheme?
- Yes ☐ 1
- No ☒ 2 Col 22
- Don't know ☐ 3
61. Did your employer offer a creche or day nursery?
- Yes ☐ 1
- No ☒ 2 Col 23
62. If yes, was it?
- Free ☐ 1
- Paid ☐ 2 Col 24
- Paid but subsidised ☐ 3
63. If there was a charge for using the creche was it, in your opinion, affordable?
- Yes ☐ 1
- No ☐ 2 Col 25
- (Note to interviewer: 64 to non-returners only)
64. Would the availability of any of the above have altered your decision on going back to work?
- Yes ☐ 1
- No ☐ 2 Col 26

65. If your employer was to offer a creche or day nursery would it be of use to you only if it was:

Free

☒ 1

Subsidised

☐ 2

Either free or subsidised

☐ 3

Neither free nor subsidised would be of use

☐ 4

Col 27

66. Would you be willing to pay the market rate for a workplace creche or day nursery?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Col 28

67. If the creche or day nursery were offered at a subsidised rate what would you consider to be an affordable price per child per week?

No more than £10 p.w.

☒ 1

No more than £20 p.w.

☐ 2

No more than £30 p.w.

☐ 3

No more than £40 p.w.

☐ 4

No more than £50 p.w.

☐ 5

Col 29

68. Does your husband's/partner's employer offer paternity leave?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Don't know

☐ 3

Col 30

69. Does your husband's/partner's employer offer parental leave?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Don't know

☐ 3

Col 31

(Note to interviewer: 77 to non-returners only)

77. Was availability and suitability of childcare a factor in your decision not to return to work?

Most important factor

☐ 1

Significant factor

☐ 2

Col 41

Influenced but not significantly

☐ 3

Played no part in decision

☐ 4

SECTION K

(Note to Interviewer: 78 and 79 to returners only)

SHOW CARD K1

78. What would you say have been the most important influences upon your decision to return to work following this period of Maternity Leave? (Please rank top 3 in order of importance, 1 being most important).

Need the money:

for essentials

☒ 1

Col 42

for extras

☐

Col 43

for personal spending/financial independence

☐

Col 44

Security/insecurity of husband's/partner's job

☒ 2

Col 45

Own earnings potential

☒ 3

Col 46

Career reasons

☐

Col 47

Work is important to my identity/personal satisfaction

☐

Col 48

Husband's/partner's attitude

☐

Col 49

Husband/partner shares domestic work

☐

Col 50

Husband/partner shares childcare

☐

Col 51

Employer offers "carer-friendly" employment facilities

☐

Col 52

Availability of satisfactory and affordable childcare

☐

Col 53

Other (specify)

☐

Col 54

73. Who will be responsible for making and monitoring childcare arrangements?

Self

☐ 1

Husband/partner

☐ 2

Jointly

☒ 3

Col 36

74. Will you make different arrangements for term time and school holidays?

Yes

☐ 1

No

☒ 2

Col 37

75. How will childcare be financed?

Own earnings

☐ 1

Husband's/partner's earnings

☐ 2

Joint income

☐ 3

No costs involved

☒ 4

Col 38

76. On average how much will you be spending on childcare per week?

No costs involved

☒ 01

Less than £10

☐ 02

£10 - £20

☐ 03

£21 - £30

☐ 04

£31 - £40

☐ 05

£41 - £50

☐ 06

£51 - £60

☐ 07

£61 - £70

☐ 08

More than £70

☐ 09

Don't know

☐ 10

Col 39

80. What would you say have been the most important influences upon your decision not to return to work following this period of Maternity Leave? *(Please rank top 3 in order of importance, 1 being most important).*

Didn't need the money:

for essentials	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 68
for extras	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 69
for personal spending	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 70
Husband's/partner's job is secure	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 71
Own earnings potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 72
Career reasons e.g. no promotions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 73
Work is not important to my identity/personal satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 74
Husband's/partner's attitude	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 75
Husband/partner does not share domestic work	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 76
Husband/partner does not share childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 77
Employer does not offer "carer-friendly" employment facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 78
Non-availability of satisfactory and affordable childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 79
Other (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Col 80

SHOW CARD K1

APPENDIX 4

This DISCRIMINANT analysis requires 2064 bytes of memory.

----- D I S C R I M I N A N T A N A L Y S I S -----

On groups defined by VAR007 Returning to Work after Maternity Leave

202 (Unweighted) cases were processed.

42 of these were excluded from the analysis.

0 had missing or out-of-range group codes.

42 had at least one missing discriminating variable.

160 (Unweighted) cases will be used in the analysis.

Number of cases by group

		Number of cases		
VAR007		Unweighted	Weighted	Label
1		110	110.0	Yes
2		50	50.0	No
Total		160	160.0	

Group means

VAR007	VAR038	OSAL	FINANCE	VAR076R
1	1.40909	2.24545	2.13636	1.81818
2	1.80000	1.42000	1.84000	2.18000
Total	1.53125	1.98750	2.04375	1.93125

VAR007	HISVIEW	VAR082	VAR086	VAR117
1	2.72727	2.06364	1.82727	3.35455
2	2.64000	1.68000	1.86000	4.00000
Total	2.70000	1.94375	1.83750	3.55625

Group standard deviations

VAR007	VAR038	OSAL	FINANCE	VAR076R
1	.85986	.80351	.69701	.76843
2	1.12486	.70247	.76559	.71969
Total	.96428	.86138	.72984	.76989

VAR007	HISVIEW	VAR082	VAR086	VAR117
1	.68949	.38971	.50428	.89429
2	.48487	.62073	.40457	.00000
Total	.63246	.50466	.47434	.79895

----- D I S C R I M I N A N T A N A L Y S I S -----

On groups defined by VAR007 Returning to Work after Maternity Leave

Analysis number 1

Direct method: all variables passing the tolerance test are entered.

Minimum tolerance level..... .00100

Canonical Discriminant Functions

Maximum number of functions..... 1

Minimum cumulative percent of variance... 100.00

Maximum significance of Wilks' Lambda.... 1.0000

Prior probabilities

Group	Prior	Label
1	.68750	Yes
2	.31250	No
Total	1.00000	

Canonical Discriminant Functions

Pct of Cum Canonical After Wilks'

Fcn	Eigenvalue	Variance	Pct	Corr	Fcn Lambda	Chi-square	df	Sig
1	.7536	100.00	100.00	.6555	0 .570263	86.495	8	.0000

1* .7536 100.00 100.00 .6555 :

* Marks the 1 canonical discriminant functions remaining in the analysis.

Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients

	Func 1
VAR038	.05704
OSAL	.69224
FINANCE	.22238
VAR076R	-.10513
HISVIEW	.07718
VAR082	.49208
VAR086	-.02707
VAR117	-.68201

Structure matrix:

Pooled within-groups correlations between discriminating variables
and canonical discriminant functions

(Variables ordered by size of correlation within function)

	Func 1
OSAL	.57334
VAR117	-.46691
VAR082	.43528
VAR076R	-.25796
FINANCE	.22148
VAR038	-.22110
HISVIEW	.07406
VAR086	-.03697

Canonical discriminant functions evaluated at group means (group centroids)

Group	Func 1
1	.58160
2	-1.27951

Symbol	Group	Label
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	5
6	6	6
7	7	7
8	8	8
9	9	9
10	10	10
11	11	11
12	12	12
13	13	13
14	14	14
15	15	15
16	16	16
17	17	17
18	18	18
19	19	19
20	20	20
21	21	21
22	22	22
23	23	23
24	24	24
25	25	25
26	26	26
27	27	27
28	28	28
29	29	29
30	30	30
31	31	31
32	32	32
33	33	33
34	34	34
35	35	35
36	36	36
37	37	37
38	38	38
39	39	39
40	40	40
41	41	41
42	42	42
43	43	43
44	44	44
45	45	45
46	46	46
47	47	47
48	48	48
49	49	49
50	50	50
51	51	51
52	52	52
53	53	53
54	54	54
55	55	55
56	56	56
57	57	57
58	58	58
59	59	59
60	60	60
61	61	61
62	62	62
63	63	63
64	64	64
65	65	65
66	66	66
67	67	67
68	68	68
69	69	69
70	70	70
71	71	71
72	72	72
73	73	73
74	74	74
75	75	75
76	76	76
77	77	77
78	78	78
79	79	79
80	80	80
81	81	81
82	82	82
83	83	83
84	84	84
85	85	85
86	86	86
87	87	87
88	88	88
89	89	89
90	90	90
91	91	91
92	92	92
93	93	93
94	94	94
95	95	95
96	96	96
97	97	97
98	98	98
99	99	99
100	100	100

using Direct

----- DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS -----
 On groups defined by VAR007 Returning to Work after Maternity Leave

202 (Unweighted) cases were processed.

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2	2.64000		1.68000	1.86000	4.00000
Total	2.70000		1.94375	1.83750	3.55625

Group standard deviations

VAR007	VAR038	OSAL	FINANCE	VAR076R
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Total	.96428	.86138	.72984	.76989
VAR007	HISVIEW	VAR082	VAR086	VAR117
1	.68949	.38971	.50428	.89429
2	.48487	.62073	.40457	.00000
Total	.63246	.50466	.47434	.79895

----- DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS -----
 On groups defined by VAR007 Returning to Work after Maternity Leave

Analysis number 1

Stepwise variable selection

Selection rule: minimize Wilks' Lambda

Maximum number of steps..... 16

Minimum tolerance level..... .00100

Minimum F to enter..... 3.84000

Maximum F to remove..... 2.71000

Canonical Discriminant Functions

Maximum number of functions..... 1

Minimum cumulative percent of variance... 100.00

Maximum significance of Wilks' Lambda.... 1.0000

Prior probabilities

Group	Prior	Label
1	.68750	Yes
2	.31250	No
Total	1.00000	

----- Variables not in the Analysis after Step 0 -----

Variable	Tolerance	Minimum Tolerance	F to Enter	Wilks' Lambda
VAR038	1.0000000	1.0000000	5.8204893	.9644703
OSAL	1.0000000	1.0000000	39.1392104	.8014641
FINANCE	1.0000000	1.0000000	5.8406731	.9643515
VAR076R	1.0000000	1.0000000	7.9227674	.9522503
HISVIEW	1.0000000	1.0000000	.6531175	.9958834
VAR082	1.0000000	1.0000000	22.5586164	.8750621
VAR086	1.0000000	1.0000000	.1627747	.9989708
VAR117	1.0000000	1.0000000	25.9567604	.8588975

 At step 1, OSAL was included in the analysis.

Wilks' Lambda	.80146	Degrees of Freedom	1	Signif.	Between Groups
Equivalent F	39.13921	1	158.0	.0000	

----- Variables in the Analysis after Step 1 -----

Variable	Tolerance	F to Remove	Wilks' Lambda
OSAL	1.0000000	39.1392	

----- Variables not in the Analysis after Step 1 -----

Variable	Tolerance	Minimum Tolerance	F to Enter	Wilks' Lambda
VAR038	.9382853	.9382853	.6254076	.7982841
FINANCE	.9334028	.9334028	.5491514	.7986705
VAR076R	.9580330	.9580330	1.9538800	.7916124
HISVIEW	.9669142	.9669142	3.1194364	.7858500
VAR082	.9997004	.9997004	17.1608306	.7224923
VAR086	.9937282	.9937282	.6475742	.7981719
VAR117	.9334131	.9334131	38.4048593	.6439444

At step 2, VAR117 was included in the analysis.

		Degrees of Freedom	Signif.	Between Groups
Wilks' Lambda	.64394	2	158.0	
Equivalent F	43.40494	2	157.0	.0000

----- Variables in the Analysis after Step 2 -----

Variable	Tolerance	F to Remove	Wilks' Lambda
----------	-----------	-------------	---------------

OSAL	.9334131	52.4077	.8588975
------	----------	---------	----------

VAR117	.9334131	38.4049	.8014641
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----- Variables not in the Analysis after Step 2 -----

Variable	Tolerance	Minimum	F to Enter	Wilks' Lambda
----------	-----------	---------	------------	---------------

VAR038	.9183918	.8617264	.0101466	.6439025
--------	----------	----------	----------	----------

FINANCE	.9332329	.8765887	.5430464	.6417106
---------	----------	----------	----------	----------

VAR076R	.9560902	.8925214	1.0012198	.6398379
---------	----------	----------	-----------	----------

HISVIEW	.9602148	.9107394	1.2568180	.6387979
---------	----------	----------	-----------	----------

VAR082	.9979133	.9317445	15.5158706	.5856911
--------	----------	----------	------------	----------

VAR086	.9897428	.9253609	1.1488153	.6392369
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At step 3, VAR082 was included in the analysis.

		Degrees of Freedom	Signif.	Between Groups
Wilks' Lambda	.58569	3	158.0	
Equivalent F	36.78400	3	156.0	.0000

----- Variables in the Analysis after Step 3 -----

Variable	Tolerance	F to Remove	Wilks' Lambda
----------	-----------	-------------	---------------

OSAL	.9333815	45.5378	.7566598
------	----------	---------	----------

VAR082	.9979133	15.5159	.6439444
--------	----------	---------	----------

VAR117	.9317445	36.4373	.7224923
--------	----------	---------	----------

----- Variables not in the Analysis after Step 3 -----

Variable	Tolerance	Minimum	F to Enter	Wilks' Lambda
----------	-----------	---------	------------	---------------

VAR038	.9177362	.8615808	.0000184	.5856911
--------	----------	----------	----------	----------

FINANCE	.8766403	.8724937	2.8029932	.5752877
---------	----------	----------	-----------	----------

VAR076R	.9551225	.8925206	.6930639	.5830839
---------	----------	----------	----------	----------

HISVIEW	.9575081	.9105598	.7536842	.5828570
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VAR086	.9511377	.9248003	.0812179	.5853844
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F level or tolerance or VIN insufficient for further computation.

Summary Table

Step	Action	Vars	Wilks'
------	--------	------	--------

1	Entered	OSAL	1
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2	Removed	VAR117	2
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3	Removed	VAR082	3
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1	Yes	1
2	No	2

[illegible]

Actual Group	No. of Cases	Predicted Group Membership
1	1	1
2	2	2

Group	1	146	131	89	10
Yes					
No					

No	Percent of "grouped" cases correctly classified:
89.4	84.16%
30.4%	

cases 0
passacord aiam sasec (pacluatamuc) 202

Preceding task required 3.41 seconds elapsed.

EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS FOLLOWING MATERNITY LEAVE

E.C.ACKAH

Note re Anonymity

1. The researcher was supplied with names and addresses of maternity leave applicants who had not responded to their employer's invitation to opt out of the study.
2. Maternity leave applicants were assured of complete confidentiality regarding responses in both the initial communication from the researcher (Appendix 2) and at the time of interview.
3. No names or addresses were noted at any point on the interview questionnaire (Appendix 3) - each questionnaire was allocated a case number.
4. In data processing cases were identified and analysed by case number only, including "misclassified" cases which were referred for indepth manual analysis of qualitative data.
5. In the report where specific cases are referred to which might be readily identified, for example because the case or partner are members of a "minority" occupational grouping, details have been changed which are not material to the result of the analysis but which do alter the description of the respondent.
6. The above applies in all reports resulting from this study, including those which have been or will be made available to employers.