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**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF
MOTHERHOOD ON WOMEN'S CAREERS;
A MIXED METHODS APPROACH**

S H PHILLIPS-BAKER

PhD

2022

**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF
MOTHERHOOD ON WOMEN'S CAREERS;
A MIXED METHODS APPROACH**

SUSIE PHILLIPS-BAKER

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of the requirements of the
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Faculty of Health & Life Sciences

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Abstract

In recent decades, careers are increasingly driven by flexibility, reliant on individual resources and emphasising employability skills and behaviours. As women continue to hold much responsibility for childcare and domestic duties, they are more likely to experience career interruption and experience a 'motherhood penalty' including lack of progression and pay penalties. Research in this area has typically focused on the outcomes and material costs, and less attention has been paid to the ways in which careers are impacted by motherhood from a psychological perspective.

Three studies comprise this mixed-methods PhD, starting with a systematic review of literature on the psychological factors impacting on career decisions for women with children. Qualitative narrative interviews were conducted to investigate the factors influencing their career decisions and finally, relationships between self-efficacy, employability, and career success were investigated through an online survey (N=428) looking at the interaction between psychological resources and career success for UK women with and without children analysed using structural equation modelling.

Findings indicated that working women with children navigate many changes and shifts in their careers after children with career decisions influenced by compromise, including re-prioritising aspirations and self-limiting success. Results emphasised the individualisation of career decisions for working women with children and the role of career self-efficacy was important to their perceived employability. Women with children reported higher internal employability, and links are made to psychological factors such as low levels of confidence and perceived lack of external opportunities including flexible working options.

The research outcomes reinforced the value of maintaining employability over time, as well as access to quality flexible working opportunities, particularly at the more senior levels. Supporting women in reaching positions of seniority, not only increases diversity of representation but also encourages those coming up through the organisation through visible role models.

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Author's declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas, and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved.

Approval has been sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee on 04/10/2019 & 07/02/2020.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 62,746 words

Name: Susie Phillips-Baker

Signature: _____

Date: 28th February 2022

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Women in the workplace

The UK employment rate among women of 'prime working age' (aged 25-54) has increased continually since the 1970s largely due to a major change in working patterns at certain points in the life cycle, with more women in employment over the course of their mid-to-late 20s and early 30s (Roantree & Vira, 2017). Such changes are attributed in part to women both cohabiting and having children less frequently and later in life, with a rise in the numbers of working-age mothers in paid work, a growth most significant among lone mothers and mothers of pre-school- and primary-school-age children. Women are also now less likely to drop out of the labour market around the time they have their first child, and much more likely to stay in paid work in the years following (Roantree & Vira, 2017). Another factor in the rise in female employment is the increase in state pension for women which, under the 2011 Pensions Act, increased from 60 to 65, which then became 66 for both men and women (DWP, 2011).

Despite some parity in the percentages of men and women in the workplace, a gender pay gap persists, with women in full-time employment paid less than their male counterparts. The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) described the gender pay gap as a calculation of "the difference between average hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of men and women as a proportion of men's average hourly earnings (excluding overtime)" (ONS, 2021). In 2017 the UK passed legislation requiring all employers with more than 250 employees to report their pay data. Data from 2020 shows approximately half of the 10,000 companies required to report data did so, with the average results reporting a 12.9% gender gap (Catalyst, 2020) with a slight drop to 12.3% in more recent data (OECD¹, 2022). A 2020 report by the US Economic Policy Institute revealed that from 2003-2018 US women made up 60% of the part-time work force and therefore experienced the highest wage penalty for working part-time jobs (Golden, 2020). In the UK, most of those in

¹ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental economic organisation with 38 member countries founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade.

part-time and lower status jobs are female, thus receiving low wages with limited opportunities for progression and the potential for flexible workers to suffer negative career consequences (UK GEO, 2019).

As of June 2020, a little over 70% of women aged between 16 and 64 are in employment, compared to 80% of men (ONS, June 2020). While some progress has been made towards equality of opportunity for women in the workplace, the representation at the most senior levels remains largely dominated by men (Madsen et al., 2020). There is evidence of an increase in the proportion of women in senior positions working part-time, however, according to a UK Government report, this may be primarily due to those women already in senior roles negotiating a reduction in hours (UK GEO, 2019). According to a report produced by the consultancy PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) in 2021, based on employment figures for OECD countries in 2019, it is estimated it will be another 22 years before women's participation rate in the workforce will reach parity with male counterparts, and 112 years to close the gender pay gap (PWC, 2021).

We can surmise that the evidence thus far has pointed to a gender pay gap in relation to lower earnings, increased likelihood of working part-time hours to manage childcare responsibilities and a tendency not to progress to senior leadership roles in organisations at the rate of men. However, what is not fully understood are the reasons behind this, which includes the choices that women are making and factors behind those decisions. To understand these factors, we must first consider how careers have changed over the decades.

1.2. The changing nature of careers

The landscape of the western workplace has seen significant changes in recent decades, including increased globalisation, organisational changes, and competition amongst organisations (Vinberg, 2012). At the same time, a new model of careers has emerged which has seen the concept of careers shift from the traditional, linear career, typically based on male workers, to a more flexible, modern career which recognises variation between the careers of men and women (Tomlinson et al., 2018). With increasing numbers of women in the workforce, the traditional view

of careers which is based on the male career pattern is no longer appropriate (Vinberg, 2012; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008). The structure of careers has changed in recent decades in response to the increased globalisation and advances in technology, with careers shifting from the more traditional organisation-for-life towards an increasing movement between organisations (Akkermans et al, 2018; Coleman & Thomas, 2017; Sullivan, 2001). A move described as “lifetime employment to lifetime employability” (Baruch, 2001, p.544). The responsibility for careers has also shifted, away from the organisation towards the individual; increasingly driven by flexibility (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008) and from a linear, ladder-like structure to a more free-form, non-linear pathway, more self-directed in nature (Hirschi, 2012). This responsibility for careers moving increasingly towards the individual (Akkermans et al., 2018; Arnold, 1997; Sultana, 2010) and changing workplaces requiring workers to be more agile, taking control of their own career development (De Vos et al., 2009; Whitmarsh et al., 2007).

Within this landscape and linked to the Gender Pay Gap described in 1.1, mothers tend to experience disadvantage in their career in comparison to childless women, referred to as a ‘motherhood penalty’, reported across numerous studies and primarily focusing on financial penalties (Anderson, 2018; Budig et al., 2012; Kahn et al., 2014; Luhr, 2020; Fuller et al., 2018). Research into the motherhood penalty has also revealed issues beyond the financial implications and explored and identified differences between the careers of men and women, such as organisation specific challenges for women with children which include career continuation (Lu et al., 2017), career punishment (Aisenbrey et al., 2009) and occupational status penalty (Abendroth et al., 2014). This indicates that women’s careers have recently been likened to a labyrinth, consisting of twists and turns, dead ends, and complexity (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

1.3. Support for working mothers: Legislation and activism

The right to request flexible working was introduced by section 47 of the Employment Act 2002 and finally extended to include all employees by the Children and Families Act 2014 (Pyper, 2018). However, one survey of almost 13,000 London based working mothers carried out by the Trades

Union Congress (TUC²) and the campaign group Mother Pukka, found that half reported that a request for flexible working made to their current employer was either turned down or only partially accepted. Additionally, of those working flexibly, more than four out of five reported facing discrimination and disadvantage at work, and two in five were concerned about discrimination in asking about flexible working in a job interview (The Guardian, 2021). Thus, despite legislation the reality may be that working parents, and others who require flexible working, may find it difficult to access. This could be attributed to lack of sufficient organisational support for parents, and in particular mothers, to enable them to manage the work/home interface effectively (van Breeschoten & Evertsson, 2019). Indeed, the extent to which organisations offer family-friendly arrangements for working mothers may additionally explain the differences for mothers, forcing women to leave or reduce their work participation to manage the work family interface (Andersen, 2018). Certainly, the conditions by which organisations may provide family friendly work arrangements vary by country, which may relate to contextual factors influencing individual agency and institutional contexts such as gendered workplaces (Wiß, 2017).

In their 2019 Working Families Index, the charity of the same name reported that parents were making use of formal or informal flexibility in their work, however, some also reported making career-limiting choices – such as turning down promotions or new opportunities – to find a more flexible employer. This report also highlighted issues with higher-level jobs and flexibility with one in ten respondents taking a step down in their role to gain flexibility (Working Families, 2019). The authors conclude that more could be done to ensure employers and workers aren't missing out on the mutual benefits of flexible working. In 2021, the UK Government launched a consultation on flexible working, covering the wider work being undertaken by the government to encourage and support flexible working, work which also responds to relevant proposals from the same Government's earlier consultation on supporting working families, in 2019, with details of both still to be published (UK Gov, 2021b). Currently, the government proposes a further development to the right to request flexible working, under new proposals to make this right an entitlement from

² In Britain, the TUC is an organisation which represents trade unions, and to which most trade unions belong.

day one of employment (UK Gov, 2021a; CIPD, 2021). The TUC – alongside a group called the Flex for All alliance which includes interested campaign groups such as Pregnant then Screwed, Fawcett Society, Mother Pukka, the Young Women's Trust and the Fatherhood Institute – support this change and have also called for employers to also publish flexible working options in job adverts to improve accessibility and transparency, as well as give successful applicants a day-one right to take it up (O'Grady, 2019). CIPD³ have similarly introduced a campaign 'Flex From 1st' to promote equality of flexible working arrangements to its members (CIPD, 2021).

Many campaigns have emerged specifically to support working mothers and the issues they face in the workplace. In the last decade, organisations including Pregnant Then Screwed, dedicated to ending the 'systemic, cultural and institutional discrimination' faced by pregnant women and mothers; Mother Pukka, with the campaign 'Flex Appeal', aiming for more flexible working for all workers; and the 'Parental Pay Equality' (PPE) Campaign, dedicated to the self-employed who face a specific childcare burden without shared parental support, among many others. The work-life balance charity in the UK, Working Families, has, throughout its 40-year history, worked to remove the barriers that people with caring responsibilities face in the workplace. The Fawcett Society for gender quality, lead an annual Equal Pay Day campaign which marks the day where UK women, on average, stop earning relative to men because of the gender pay gap. In 2021, this day was 18 November, 5 years prior equal pay day was 10th November 2016, so the pace of change is slow. As part of their 2021 campaign, the Fawcett Society launched a new pledge to stop asking new recruits how much they were paid in their previous jobs, calling on employers to take the #EndSalaryHistory pledge, to put an end to a practice which they claim reinforces gender, race, and disability inequality (Fawcett Society, 2021). In 2017, an online media campaign #PayMeToo was launched by cross-party MPs aimed to encourage working women to challenge their organisations through providing advice on how to tackle the gender pay gap where they work, including working with trade unions and women's networks.

³ The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, commonly known as the CIPD, is a professional association for HR professionals.

Other relevant proposals include requiring organisations to publish parental pay and benefits (Milner, 2019) with a recent bill to introduce mandatory reporting of this nature presented to UK parliament, although not progressed at the time due to other political priorities. A benchmark report by the leadership coaching consultancy ECC – which reviewed websites of ‘Times Top 100 Graduate Employers’ in 2019/20 – found a small improvement in visibility of policies on flexible working arrangements, pay and duration of parental leave, with an increase in those including full details and a decrease in those reporting little or no details. This report also identifies the quality and detail of information on parental benefits as an increasingly critical tool in attracting and retaining the right talent to thrive and compete (ECC, 2020).

1.4. Motherhood and careers

There is evidence in the research base of a specific pay penalty for working mothers (Benard et al., 2008; Correll et al., 2007; TUC/IPPR, 2016), between 9 and 18% in the US and UK (Gangl & Zeifle, 2009) and as much as 29% difference for two or more children (Anderson et al., 2002; Staff & Mortimer, 2012). Prior research proposes that for women with children, who remain responsible for the bulk of the domestic and childcare responsibilities, these factors may also be punitive in terms of human capital depreciation (Khan et al., 2014; Staff & Mortimer, 2012). Additionally, preference theory suggests that women are facing a free, unconstrained choice within which they prioritise family over work (Hakim, 2002), which could be interpreted as reflecting a lack of commitment to their career (Woolnough & Redshaw, 2016). This would imply that women who are work-centred are choosing to remain childless (Yerkes, 2013). However, additional analysis of longitudinal data has failed to support the existence of such unconstrained choice, instead highlighting the existence of barriers which impact on the availability of choice for women (McRae, 2003). Such barriers may include perceived violation of an ideal worker norm, exacerbated through organisational and societal expectations – such as promotion of traditional career values and cultures of long working hours –further impeding women’s careers (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008, Weisshaar, 2018). This supports the notion that choices for women with children in the workplace

may not be a straightforward reflection of 'want' and that it is valuable to consider the factors that are influencing these decisions (Morgan, 2015; Young, 2018).

Despite a widespread recognition of variations in career patterns between men and women, the widely accepted 'traditional career pattern' still refers to long-term, full-time employment in one organisation – a position based on the male career model and one more likely to be followed by men (Biemann et al., 2012). As the work of many women tends to be more embedded in broader life contexts, such as family, their careers are more prone to these 'individual costs' and tend to reflect a wider range and variety of patterns than men's careers (Guan et al., 2019). According to Abele and Spurk (2009), lack of continuity in women's careers and reduction in working hours are the major determinants of their lower career success (in Evers & Sieverding, 2014). Long working hours may also reduce the possibility of combining work with any external responsibilities (UK GEO, 2019).

Understanding the constellation between work, home and parenting is important to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which the life cycles of a career occur (Super, 1990). Interruptions may result from having children and whilst this increasingly impacts on both parents, the primary impact remains on women (Mavriplis et al., 2010; Sevilla & Smith, 2020). Indeed, while there may have been an increase in participation of women in the workplace in recent years, and in the participation of fathers at home (Hook & Wolf, 2012) childcare remains a predominantly female responsibility (Carlson et al., 2020) and so the balance of work and home continue to considerably influence the progress of women's careers more than men's (Daly, 2002; Gracia & Esping-Andersen, 2015; Young, 2018).

Organisations have been working to improve some of these issues including supporting upskilling following career gaps, with some positive steps towards providing more support to women with children to manage the challenges of developing their career through maternity leave and early childhood development, as well as re-entry following a period of absence from the workplace (Greer, 2013; Panteli & Pen, 2010). Whilst not a new concept (Shaw et al., 2000) specific programmes to support women returners are increasingly offered by individual

organisations, rather than as government initiatives. For example, the UK has seen a rapid growth in the number of programmes specifically targeted at returning women, from 3 in 2014 to 53 in 2019 (Women Returners, 2021). However, in many workplaces there exists some persistent norms which include overwork, expectations of constant availability and excess workloads, each conflicting with unpaid caring responsibilities and again much of the latter still falls on women (UK GEO, 2019). Such a differential impact of family responsibilities on women can be considered a critical factor making the careers of women worthy of specific investigation in and of themselves (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

1.5. Research issues and questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore the impact of motherhood on women's careers. This thesis is a psychological study using a mixed method design (see chapter 3 for methodology) to explore the question: How are women's careers impacted by motherhood, from a psychological perspective? Following a review of the literature thus far on what is known about the careers of women with children (see chapter 2) three specific research issues have been identified to which this thesis will respond, each with its own research questions. These are outlined below:

1.5.1. Issue 1

The research on the impact of motherhood on careers is fragmented and not sufficiently focused on psychological factors.

There has been a variety of research looking at the career decisions of women with children, although this has been "multidisciplinary and fragmented" (Zimmerman & Clark, 2016, p.604). Additionally, this research has often focused on earning differences (Glass & Fodor, 2018) and financial and material outcomes between mothers and nonmothers and to a lesser extent on the psychological factors (Bao et al., 2021). Moreover, research in this area has focused on the impact of pregnancy and maternity leave, and early career gaps with less focus on the later stages of working alongside raising a family. Those studies focusing on later stages tend to use primarily

quantitative data including employment and panel data (e.g., Fouarge et al., 2011; Gash, 2009; Kahn et al., 2014) neglecting the underlying psychological factors (Ekin, 2007).

With women increasingly engaging in the workplace and thus contributing to economic success of families and organisations, a summary of relevant research influencing women's career patterns is timely and worthwhile. This thesis thus begins with a systematic review of the literature, to bring together recent findings in the literature and to understand more about the research into psychological factors influencing women with children's career decisions in recent decades.

Research Question 1. What is known in the literature about the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers, from post maternity through schooling? (Chapter 4)

1.5.2. Issue 2

Women's own experience of the impact of motherhood on careers is required.

Women's careers are impacted due to having children, with research identifying financial penalties (Anderson, 2018; Budig et al., 2012; Kahn et al., 2014; Luhr, 2020; Fuller et al., 2018) as well as other penalties including occupational status (Abendroth et al., 2014) and career punishment (Aisenbrey et al., 2009). It has been suggested that there is less understanding of the circumstances surrounding the different career paths (Lu et al., 2017) with career decision-making for working mothers generally overlooked in the research (Grether & Wiese, 2016; Noon & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020). Researchers agree that more research into the ways in which this occurs is needed (Han et al., 2018; Tomlinson et al., 2018; Woolnough & Redshaw, 2016). Likewise, more research is required to explore women's own understanding of these issues, and of the factors they identify as influencing career-related decisions to support them more effectively (McIntosh et al., 2012). The second study in this PhD will therefore build on the review of current research with an examination of the lived experiences and career decisions of a sample of UK working mothers.

Research Question 2. How does motherhood influence the careers of working mothers, from their own perspective? (Chapter 5)

1.5.3. Issue 3

The current career landscape which highlights psychological resources, employability and career success is important for women with and without children in different ways.

The contemporary career landscape is one which sees the individual increasingly responsible for career decisions, career development and opportunities (Akkermans et al., 2018; Hirschi, 2012; Rojewski et al., 2017). Careers are less boundaried for individuals in terms of job opportunities and more independent from the traditional one-organisation-for-life (Akkermans et al., 2018; Arthur et al., 2005; Coleman & Thomas, 2017). In this boundaryless career context, psychological factors such as self-efficacy (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019) as well as employability (Williams et al., 2016) are receiving more attention. In addition, employability security has replaced job security (Drange et al., 2018; Haasler, 2013). This is pertinent to working mothers who are substantially influenced by the balance of work and home in their career progress (Daly, 2002; Gracia & Esping-Andersen, 2015; Young, 2018) reducing their availability of work time (Trappe et al., 2015) and increasing 'daily hassles' which in turn reduces their confidence (Broadnax, 2016). To develop an understanding of the impact of motherhood, this final study investigates the relationship between the psychological factor of self-efficacy, employability, and career success, comparing women with and without children.

Research question 3. How do the psychological resources of self-efficacy impact on employability and career success for working women with and without children? (Chapter 6).

1.6. Summary

To comprehensively address the three research questions, this thesis will take a mixed methods approach by first undertaking a detailed investigation into the current research on the topic providing a review and synthesis of the research from the past two decades on the psychological factors which influence the career decisions of women with children using a systematic review approach (chapter 4). Next, a qualitative study based on narrative interviews with a sample of working mothers based in the UK to look in depth at their career experiences

following motherhood, to understand the factors influencing their career decisions (chapter 5). Finally, a quantitative research study looking at perceptions of career-related personal resources including self-efficacy and employability in relation to the career success of women with and without children, will be conducted to further understand the impact of motherhood on women's careers (chapter 6).

The current research is concerned with addressing the above issues and thus contributing to the research in relation to the careers of women with children. This research aims to consequently develop up to date understanding of existing issues, namely how motherhood impacts on women's careers, as well as to investigate new and emerging issues worthy of investigation in this context; two features worthy of doctoral research (Trafford & Lesham, 2008).

Chapter 2 now provides an overview of the relevant literature pertaining to these research issues and questions.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter comprises a review of the literature pertinent to the research question(s) outlined in the introduction. Commencing with a consideration of the impact of motherhood on careers described in the research as the motherhood penalty, this is followed by a review of career theory and the decision-making of working mothers in relation to their careers. Next, the concepts of employability, sustainability, and identity are explored in the context of the modern-day career. The chapter concludes with the focus for current study and an outline of the thesis aims and objectives.

2.1. The motherhood penalty

The motherhood pay penalty relates to the pay gap between working mothers and similar women without dependent children (TUC/IPPR, 2016). Mothers earn less per hour than women with no children, and that this penalty persists even after controlling for relevant variables such as education, work experience, and other occupational variables (Staff & Mortimer, 2012). The motherhood pay penalty for women may also increase as women have additional children (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Lips & Lawson, 2009). Estimates place the motherhood pay penalty from a 5% difference per child for mothers over and above a gender pay gap (Benard et al., 2008; Correll et al., 2007), 7% in UK (TUC/IPPR, 2016), between 9 and 18% in the US and UK (Gangl & Zeifle, 2009) and as much as 29% difference for two or more children (Anderson et al., 2002). A meta-analysis of 39 journal articles concluded an average motherhood wage gap of around 3.6-3.8% (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia, 2020). It is suggested men may experience a wage increase or 'fatherhood premium' following children, with estimations between 3% and 10% (Killewald, 2012) which cannot be related to 'their different observable characteristics' such as age or education (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Lovasz, 2020, p.13). This premium may be in part explained by increased gender-specific specialisations following parenthood, which for men resulting in increased participation in the workplace thereby increasing wages (Augustine et al., 2009).

Women with children may be perceived less positively by colleagues or supervisors, for example lower in commitment or competence, when compared with peers without children or men (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008; Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017; O'Hagan, 2018; Sanzari et al., 2021) and therefore negatively influencing subsequent career progression. Other challenges are identified such as reduced promotion prospects and lower retention rates compared to their male counterparts and to women without children (Correll et al., 2007). Concerns are also expressed in the literature around the representation of women in certain careers, including STEM, and on recruitment or retention rates through factors which include work-family conflict (Flores et al., 2021). It is suggested that within higher paid roles, time away from the workplace may bear the most impact on working mothers (England et al., 2016).

The motherhood pay penalty may be due to certain factors which can be attributed to the individual, the context, or circumstances of having children. These factors can also be attributed to certain theories which include human capital, compensating wage differentials, differences in work effort, selective allocation of women to motherhood and family unexplained or potentially discrimination of employers (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia, 2020). At the individual level the resulting gaps and the challenge of accessing quality work for working mothers' results in human capital depreciation (Khan et al., 2014; Staff & Mortimer, 2012). The more autonomy and lower teamwork requirements within a role, the less the impact of motherhood suggesting that in situations where women can exercise more control over their own working arrangements, the less negative impact becoming a mother will make (Yu & Kuo, 2017). In this way, higher level or more professional roles may mitigate against some of the impact. Indeed, some research has proposed that those on lower wages suffer the largest penalty proportionate to earnings (Hodges & Budig, 2010). However, level of education and workplace arrangements may also influence the motherhood penalty (Fuller & Hirsch, 2019). For example, a lower cost for the lower skilled, and the highest penalty for those with the highest education, including number of children with penalty increasing by number of children (Anderson et al., 2002) with lower educated women working in jobs which require lower work effort and so experiencing lower motherhood wages penalties

(Anderson et al., 2003). Although, in line with Budig and Hodges' 2010 findings, a meta-analysis found that lower educated women face stronger wage penalties, not consistent with the Anderson findings (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia, 2020).

The motherhood penalty has been attributed to the result of gaps and other changes experienced by women after having children such as maternity leave, amendments to working hours or conditions (Gangl & Zeifle, 2009; Napari, 2010). These changes may mean that working mothers who do not work full time hours also miss out on the opportunities which may be available to full time workers (Budig & England, 2001). The motherhood pay gap may endure decades after the first child was born (Viitanen, 2014) although the impact can vary depending on how long women spend away from the workplace, with evidence suggesting that the sooner women return to work, the better the longer-term career prospects (Aisenbrey et al., 2009). Indeed, whilst having children results in reduced workforce participation, the negative longer-term effects of such gaps are stronger in younger women and diminish as women age, suggesting women may recover this lost occupational status later in their career (Kahn et al., 2014). Although research into career breaks which looks at the time taken to catch up suggests that the long-term effects may not be offset in women's later stages of working life (McIntosh et al., 2012). In addition, delaying motherhood may impact on career outcomes, with one year of delay resulting in increased earnings and work experience and timing of childbirth additionally impacting on post-motherhood earnings (Miller, 2011). Finally, depreciation of human capital, lost during child-related career breaks, may be dependent on number of children, with significantly more impact for women with more than one child, and the wage gaps associated with one child on the other hand predominantly driven by mothers' choice of jobs and occupations that pay less (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia's, 2020).

The existence of barriers to progress for women, whether actual or perceived, may result in more women making choices to lower career aspirations to manage family responsibilities, or 'satisficing' or settling for fulfilling the minimum requirements necessary rather than maximising opportunities (Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992) which can impact on wellbeing of women, in particular

(Ogle, 2017). Early attempts to succeed in both the work and home sphere became unmanageable for some women, who then settle for an alternative, to either reduce career involvement, or to leave the workplace perceiving those spheres as incompatible (Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009; Kanji, 2011).

Occupational inflexibility may be responsible for women not being employed after having children, which may relate to inflexible work patterns or gendered cultural norms about breadwinning and caregiving (Ishizuka & Musick, 2021). For example, Fuller and Hirsh (2019) identified two work conditions impacting on how women attempt to organise employment and caregiving; temporal and spatial flexibility, the former relating to control over start and stop times and the latter to performing some or all work duties from home. Work interruptions and movement into family-friendly roles may account for the wage penalties although it may not be possible to entirely account for deficits by the behaviours of working mothers in the labour market (Gangl & Zeifle, 2009). Flexible work hours may still reduce disadvantage although this may be influenced by level of education with higher university education mitigating the effect of the financial penalty (Fuller & Hirsch, 2018).

In addition to this, policies in organisations may not sufficiently support women to manage these responsibilities alongside their careers, further exacerbating the issue; one example being the lack of quality flexible working options available for women (Crowley & Kolenikov, 2013; Finer-Freedman, 2014; Lawton & Thompson, 2013). There may have been some improvement in recent years, or in certain sectors, with employers expanding opportunities for flexible working as they seek to gain competitive advantage and support growth (Shanmugam & Agarwal, 2019). However there continues to be a shortage of quality part-time work and part-time experience offers very little return on experience in terms of wage growth (UK GEO, 2019; Warren & Lyonette, 2018). There are some potential benefits associated with flexible working arrangements for women such as increased job and leisure satisfaction (Wheatley, 2017). However, as a construct part-time work remains strongly linked with women (Schmidt, 2021) and thus the specific issues of access to quality flexible or part time work for women – or those in positions of primary responsibility for

childcare – remains relevant. Furthermore, while alternative ways of working, including part-time and flexible work may be important solutions to manage the challenge between work and caring responsibilities and may support women to remain in the workplace after the transition to motherhood, they may also reduce career progression and so may not offer parity as anticipated (UK GEO, 2019). Furthermore, research into the transition to part-time for female managers, and the longer-term consequences of these transitions on their career is required (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014).

As mentioned previously, another explanation put forward for the motherhood penalty is that women value family above work, and thus receive lower pay (Anderson et al., 2003; Lips & Lawson, 2009). Research also indicates that some women chose to delay the decision to have children until they reached a certain level in their career (Baker, 2010; Mills et al., 2011). Women are faced with the difficult choice to potentially sacrifice their career in order to have children (Leahy & Doughney, 2006) or to delay having children in order to pursue their careers (Martin, 2021) choices it is considered men do not typically face (Baker, 2010).

It is difficult to compare across different contexts with the variation in culture and family policies, and the motherhood pay penalty may vary dependent on the country context (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia's, 2020). Indeed, external factors such as gendered norms in society may have a negative impact on the career experiences of women with children as childcare and domestic tasks remain divided along traditional lines, thus women typically hold more responsibility for such tasks impacting on availability of work time (Trappe et al., 2015). In the US for example public childcare and longer paid maternity leave may reduce the motherhood wage penalty (Hallden et al., 2016). However, interventions such as parental leave and public childcare provision may improve wages for mothers when cultural support for this group is high and less when culture supports the male as breadwinner model (Budig et al., 2012). As well as better equality in the household, improvements in household financial wellbeing may be achieved through increased involvement of fathers (Anderson, 2018).

As above, women's responsibilities in childbirth and childcare are implicated in lower wages (Anderson, 2018). Other factors including psychological effects including lower wellbeing and work family balance issues have also been suggested although receive less attention in the literature (Bao et al., 2021). As we have seen, the evidence for a motherhood penalty is complex, influenced by the different contexts in which it operates. It is likely that a range of social, organisational, and individual factors play a part, and the interplay between factors less clear. Thus, whilst a career penalty for professional women who become mothers may be acknowledged, the research scrutiny of career decision-making itself appears to have been largely overlooked (Noon & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020).

In seeking to further uncover the ways in which motherhood impacts on women's careers and career decisions, a discussion of critical career theory is important, laying the foundations for further discovery. Thus, the following section provides an overview of traditional through to contemporary career theory.

2.2. Career theory: 'A brief history'

The traditional theories have largely focused on the view of careers which develops through a set of stages (Nagy et al., 2019), a view which has been disrupted by recent societal changes such as ageing, diversification, new technological advances as outlined previously. Influential stage-based theories of the more traditional approach include Levinson's life stage developmental model (Levinson et al., 1978; Levinson, 1986) and Super's life span model (Super, 1990). Levinson and Super's models are similar in that they consider the progress of careers throughout the lifespan to be based on an individual progressing through a series of stages, for Levinson determined by age and for Super through the achievement of series of 'mini-cycles' (Nagy et al., 2019). Levinson's career life cycle begins at childhood/pre-adulthood (up to age 22), moving into early adulthood (17-45), then middle adulthood (40-65) and late adulthood (above 60). Each stage constitutes specific behaviours which relate to career decisions and activities; in the transition to early adulthood this includes formation of dreams and plans, in the transition to middle adulthood the pursuit of plans

and goals and finally the settling down period, according to Levinson commencing around 30, ending at 40-45. These stages are built on the premise that career development is progressive, and success is built on the achievement of earlier success. His ideas were further developed by Cron (1984) whereby stages are reached through successful completion of a previous stage rather than based on specific age groups. These theories were suited to the workplace of the 20th century when employees stayed in one organisation for longer periods and tenure, or time served, was rewarded by continual upward mobility (Nagy et al., 2019). In the 21st century, a larger proportion of the workforce may experience career interruptions which impact on the accomplishment of earlier prescribed stages, for example through caring responsibilities. Another approach was required to suit the new workplace climate, with less structured and more unpredictable career patterns. Such changes were initially reflected in the protean and boundaryless careers.

The protean career is driven by the individual rather than the organisation and is characterised as self-directed and values driven (Hall, 2002). The boundaryless career claims to transcend the 'boundary' of the traditional career, away from the constraints of one occupation or organisation to one influenced by social networks, enabling more personal control than previously seen (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). These relatively well-established career typologies contain a variety of patterns influenced by factors such as individual differences and context (Arthur et al., 2005; Biemann et al., 2012). The boundaryless career typology may explain the strategy of 'opting in between' through use of various flexible working approaches in managing career choices following children (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011) and a protean career approach may provide space for more balance (Cabrera, 2009) as well as a useful lens for scholars to examine the careers of women due to its "structured yet fluid form" (Lewis et al., 2015, p.33). Other researchers are less convinced however, suggesting that many careers still maintain some boundaries and carry individual costs which negatively impact career success, which include transition difficulties or work-family conflict (Guan et al., 2019) and research has linked women following a boundaryless career with lower earnings (Cabrera, 2007). Furthermore, although attempts have been made to create suitable measures of mobility (Briscoe et al., 2006) critics also propose that the evidence-

base for these theories may be limited and that the concept may lack sufficient clarity (Gubler et al., 2014). It is also suggested that mobility between employers may not have increased as much as these theories may suggest (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010; Arnold, 2011) or may be more relevant to nontraditional occupational groups such as those freelancing, which could even represent the “protean and boundaryless career concepts in a very pure form” (Lo Presti et al., 2018, p.438).

For some, the boundaryless approach to careers may include either mental flexibility or physical mobility across organisational boundaries (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). For others, a clearer distinction should be drawn between the psychological and physical mobility of careers, rather than considering them both within one form (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019). As an alternative, they should be separated into proactive career orientation and physical mobility, perhaps more limited for mothers. The former representing the psychological mobility where individuals take a self-initiated or goal-directed approach toward their careers, the latter defined as “the subjective appraisal of one’s capacity to make career transitions” (Direnzo & Greenhaus, 2011, p. 576). Figure 1 illustrates the distinctions between the protean/boundaryless and alternative model of physical and psychological mobility (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019).

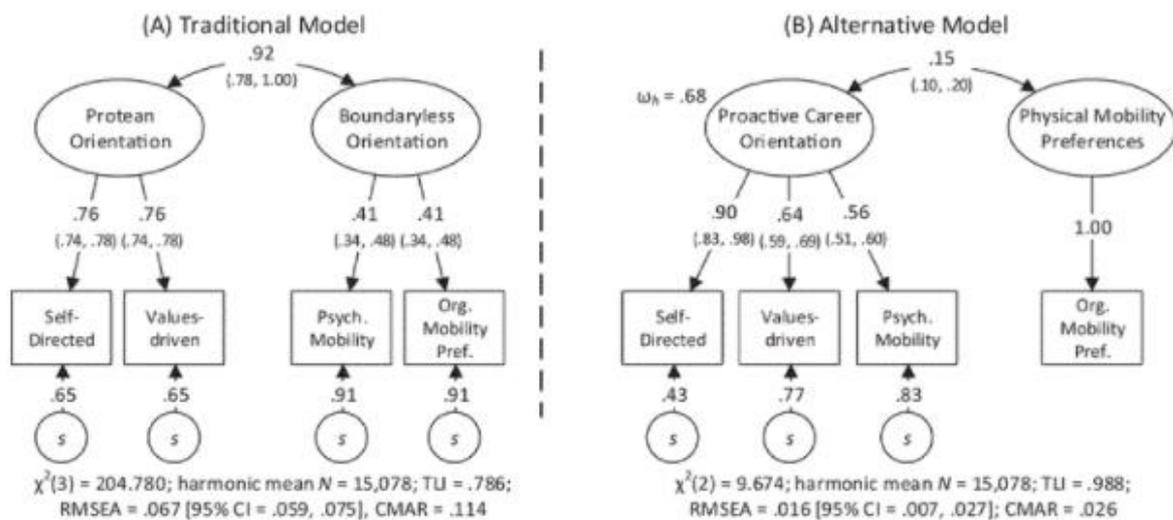


Figure 1.

The traditional and alternative models for boundaryless/protean v psychological/physical mobility (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019, p.289).

In addition, Wiernik and Kostal (2019) liken definitions of protean and boundaryless career orientations to those of self-efficacy and report a strong correlation between protean career orientation and self-efficacy, supporting the findings of previous studies such as Höge et al. (2012) and Lyons et al. (2015).

Self-efficacy has been described as the confidence an individual holds in their ability to carry out certain actions or accomplish goals (Bandura, 1997) and a well-developed sense of self-efficacy in the career domain may increase the range of career opportunities being considered and lead to better decisions and decision-making satisfaction (Betz & Hackett, 1981). As we have outlined previously, the contemporary career is one where individuals take more responsibility for their development, which may result in less predictability and more risk than the previously more stable, traditional career model (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Therefore, one important factor for individuals adapting to this type of career is an individual's confidence in their ability to take responsibility for their careers and face the relevant risks (Hall, 2004). It could be argued that women with children could become more averse to risk on becoming parents. Indeed, confidence is influenced by many factors, including beliefs about gender which may negatively impact women's decisions to take on certain roles such as in leadership for example (Bordalo et al., 2019; Hartman & Barber, 2019).

Moreover, a woman's confidence in the workplace may decline as frequency in daily stresses increases, resulting in women doubting their ability to effect change, further negatively impacting their capacity for reducing the source or frequency of daily hassles (Broadnax, 2016) resulting in a form of vicious cycle. Previous research on working conditions and wellbeing puts forward perceived control as a coping mechanism with regards to daily stresses (Magnusson Hansson et al., 2009). Thus, the presence of the day-to-day challenges such as balancing home and work may gradually impact on a woman's confidence in dealing with such challenges, which they may otherwise have dealt with successfully in the past.

Research on women's career patterns show women may decrease aspirations at later stages of their career in comparison to men, due to a stronger preference for a balance between work and

other aspects of their lives (Danziger & Eden, 2007). This is something which was also demonstrated in the research on a contemporary addition to the theory of careers which considers the impact of gender on careers in the Kaleidoscope Career Model/ KCM (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), which looked specifically at the differing needs and demands of men and women and considers how they weigh up the factors which lead to their career related decisions in a way which is directly related to gender roles. The KCM outlines three factors which, according to Mainiero and Sullivan, alternate throughout the course of the person's life, combining in different ways at different stages. These three factors of authenticity, balance and challenge are reported to move and shift in different ways for men and women, forming a sort of kaleidoscopic pattern, ultimately reflecting the varying patterns of their careers. The resulting patterns, the authors explain, suggest that women's careers are primarily influenced by balance in their mid-career, coinciding with the time when some women are having children, whereas for men the balance tends to come in their late career (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Thus, the patterns of women's careers are often different to that of men, primarily due to the former's continued role as primary caretaker (Trappe et al., 2015) therefore different factors may influence women's career decisions. The Systems Theory Framework (STF) of career development (McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 2006a) while not a theory of careers, rather an overarching framework within which careers operate can be seen to recognise the holistic and dynamic nature of career development as with KCM model. It may even be "blended" with the KCM to "enact an intentional roadmap" for women early in their career to understand the means required to manage the work life interface (Tajlili, 2014, p.256). The systems theory framework additionally recognises the part played by factors such as family, gender and even chance in the career journey, all of which are pertinent to the experience of women with children (Patton & McMahon, 2006b).

To deepen understanding of the path of women's careers, an awareness of the decision-making process as it relates to careers helps to clarify how decisions are made, represents how careers have changed and developed over time as well as distil what is considered a 'complex and personal' process which occurs throughout the life span (Hirschi, 2012). Career decision-making is

dynamic and a continuous part of the lives of working adults, rather than being confined to young people or those in early career (Albion & Fogarty, 2002). Decisions made regarding careers are wide ranging, involving not only choice of occupation, but also other decisions such as whether to continue in education, to apply for or accept a particular job, to become self-employed or to return to work after having children (Arnold, 1997). The process of decision-making, such as the decision to move roles, to become self-employed or to start working part-time, is particularly relevant to working women with children and one which warrants further investigation, and where we will next turn our attention.

2.3. Career decision-making of working mothers

Research has demonstrated that women, upon having children, make decisions on whether to remain in or leave, which some term 'opt out' of, the workplace entirely or find some form of option in between, and often these decisions are not straightforward (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). The opt out and opt in research has been "multidisciplinary" including across psychology, management, economics, and sociology, and "fragmented" (Zimmerman & Clark, 2016, p.604).

Researchers have concluded that professional mothers do not leave voluntarily, rather they are pushed out through perceived violations of the 'ideal worker norm' (Weisshaar, 2018), lack of managerial support and maternal confidence (Ladge et al., 2018), or gendered organisational cultures which can result in discrimination, inflexibility, and lack of opportunities (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014). Media attention in this area began with the 'opt out revolution' New York Times article in 2003 (Belkin, 2003), and since then interest in the 'opt in' reasons has grown. Indeed, developing a fuller understanding of the reasons behind the decisions to remain in the workplace, as this thesis aims to do, are equally important as the reasons for leaving (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011).

Another factor in discussions around career choices for working mothers is the narrative of free or compromised choice. This may be traced back to Catherine Hakim's preference theory, based on her research which posited that women's position in the workplace reflects their own choices

and preferences rather than on external constraints, such as those placed by society, which she proposed produce only minimal impact (Hakim, 2002). In this way, Hakim prioritises preferences over structural factors based on her research which concluded that work-centred preferences had the highest effect on full-time work rates of women (Hakim, 2002). Hakim identified three categories of women navigating their career, according to these personal choices, namely 'home-centred' women who choose home over work, 'work-centred' women are more committed to their careers and thirdly the 'adaptive' mother who has chosen a combination of both family and work but are not fully committed to the latter. She proposed that most women in modern affluent countries exercise a free and unconstrained choice between home and work, thus their preference drives their choice. On the other hand, Crompton and Harris (1999) highlighted the influence of institutional factors shaping women's career paths, emphasising the presence of both choice and constraints. This concept of perceived choice may also play a part in discrimination towards working mothers (Yu & Kuo, 2017) and mothers may experience more discrimination in situations where motherhood is perceived to be a choice (Kricheli-Katz, 2012). In addition to perceptions of choice, visibility of parenthood status in the workplace is influential, with some parents choosing not to discuss parental status openly with employers, and in particular black mothers are less likely to discuss children openly in their work as a way of managing the potential impact, showing additional contributing factors (Luhr, 2020).

Contrary to preference theory is the evidence that women did not differ significantly in their gender role attitudes towards work and family, and rather the constraints facing them explain the differences in their career pursuits (McRae, 2003). A contradictory choice position may also mean that women may be less inclined to gain organisational support for work-related issues, instead attempting to solve them privately, even where issues may be the responsibility of, and more effectively resolved through the organization, for example with regards to job design (Young, 2018). Hakim's work can be said to emphasise the personal choice through which women exercise their career decisions, in contrast to those who suggest that the social and economic constraints are more influential on women's decisions (Crompton & Harris, 1999; McRae, 2003; Johnstone &

Lee, 2009). For example, researchers in Australia found that women are less likely to work full-time and in management positions and more likely to work in low paid and insecure jobs because of the gendered nature of work rather than personal choice (Leahy & Doughney, 2006).

2.4. Employability in the context of the modern-day career

The rise of the boundaryless career and the move towards the individual as a driver for careers has also led to a greater attention on the concept of employability (Williams et al., 2016).

Employability is an increasingly popular area of career research, which can be described as a person's ability to gain and maintain work (Van der Heijde, 2014) and to get the job they want or to maintain the job they have (Rothwell & Arnold, 2005). Employability has been described as the new job security, and through employability security, individuals can manage and maintain their careers, where job security no longer exists (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008, Drange et al., 2018; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Haasler, 2013). Recently, the ways in which individuals perceive their own levels of employability has been of increasing interest in the literature (Veld et al., 2015) and growing "exponentially" (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2010, p.636). In the boundaryless career landscape, with a labour market in which organisational attachment is perceived as increasingly undesirable, individuals are seeking to improve their own chances further driving an individualised focus by investing in employability (Rothwell & Arnold, 2005). Beliefs about employability are also likely to drive future employment behaviours as individuals act on the perceptions of their own reality reinforcing its value to career research and leading towards future career success (DeCuyper et al., 2011).

Individuals wishing to develop employability and to navigate their careers successfully may draw support from concepts such as career competencies and career construction. Career competencies are the behaviours which enable individuals to navigate an uncertain and complex working environment (Colakoglu, 2011). These include the 'know-why' relating to beliefs and identities, the 'know-how', their skills, and knowledge, and the 'know-whom' or the networks of relationships and contacts by which people navigate their careers (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994). When

taken in combination career competencies represent valuable skills in navigating the protean or boundaryless career, suggesting their absence may result in lower levels of success (Sultana & Malik, 2019). For example, in the non-linear career progress of working women, time out of the workplace may reduce development opportunities (knowing how) or access to key networks (knowing-whom) and one important explanation for the motherhood wage penalty is that childcare disrupts the acquisition of formal education and on-the-job training (Staff & Mortimer, 2012). This is a useful lens through which to see the different behaviours and skills which enable people to navigate their careers, particularly during times of transition or challenge, including the interaction of work with family commitments experienced by women (Greenberg et al, 2016) when career-related identities can be challenged (Ibarra, 2003). For example, it is possible that knowing-why may increase should time away from the workplace encourage reflection and develop more clarity over one's career wants and needs (Cabrera, 2007).

Fittingly, Hirschi (2012) developed a model of career resources which integrates several concepts surrounding the self-directed career literature, which he proposes are pivotal to the current career landscape, including, but not limited to, career adaptability, employability, career motivation and a protean and boundaryless career orientation. Hirschi identified four 'critical resources' which create consensus between the varying but highly related theories, those of human capital, social, psychological and career identity resources. See Figure 2 for a detailed visual representing the four career resources, with arrows indicating that the resources are not static entities but do change in a dynamic process of mutual reinforcement over time (Hirschi, 2012, p.376).

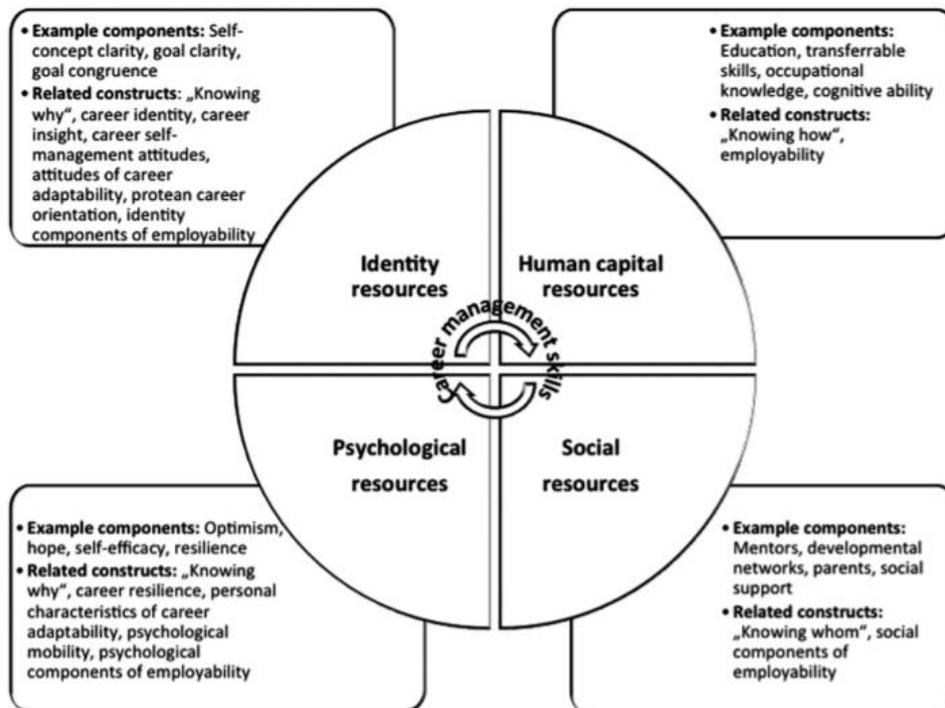


Figure 2.

Integrative framework of four career resources, with example components and related construct of each resource domain (Hirschi, 2012).

These critical resources and their dynamic nature are key for the population of women with children, who may be exiting and re-entering the workplace, and thus experiencing the changes and influences of identity, efficacy (Ladge & Greenberg, 2015), social (Hamilton Volpe & Marcinkus Murphy, 2011) and human capital resources (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysiak, 2020) in a variety of different ways. This integrative framework of career resources brings together the self-directed career management literature in a more cohesive way and enables individuals and organisations to evaluate the factors which are important to career development (Hirschi, 2012). An exploration of the factors influencing the career decisions of women with children, focusing here on the psychological resources, would shed more light on this framework for this population. These individual components and various resources also demonstrate the complexity of careers incorporating both objective and subjective aspects, which ultimately results in a wide variety of career shapes and sizes, and differences in terms of career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2020) a topic which has drawn attention in recent years and will now be described.

2.5. Developing a 'sustainable' career

The increased complexity and changes in the world of work, among other factors, have led researchers in the area to introduce the concept of the 'sustainable career' (Van der Heijden et al., 2019). This can be defined relatively simply as an individual's ability to remain in employment now and in the future (van Dam et al., 2017) although has been expanded to recognise the value to organisations as well as individuals (Ybema et al., 2020), and characterised by individual agency (Van der Heijden & de Vos, 2015). Sustainable careers reinforce the importance of reviewing and maintaining competencies which meet the needs of the current workforce. Much of the early research focused on older age employees (Le Blanc et al., 2017), but the focus has been widening. Sustainable employability is relevant to the careers of women due to gaps in employment because of child rearing and the resulting impact on maintaining currency in skills and experience throughout the career lifecycle of women (Arun et al., 2004).

According to this perspective, certain characteristics in this new world of work lead to a sustainable career, namely, one which incorporates opportunities for regular renewal and reflection, being flexible and adaptable and where skills, values and behaviours are fully integrated (Newman, 2011). De Vos et al. (2020) distinguish the sustainable from non-sustainable career through the lens of happiness, health, and productivity, which they suggest change and flex throughout one's career. Here, the authors suggest that mental as well as physical health should be considered within the sustainability of a career. In addition, satisfaction or feelings of success are important to an individual, including finding a 'fit' between values, needs and goals. This aspect of the sustainable career may also relate to creating a work-life balance and considering the growth of the individual as well as their career. Thus, in considering both the individual and contextual factors, the sustainable career seeks to recognise the interaction between the employer and employee in protecting and enhancing career sustainability over time, moving away from the more predominant individual-level viewpoint. This approach also attempts to complement other perspectives such as the protean and boundaryless approach, developing and focusing more on

the organisational context and the interplay between individual and organisation (Van der Heijden et al., 2019).

In contrast to the traditional view of careers, the sustainable career thus allows for various possible life events or 'career shocks' impacting on career success over the longer term and acknowledges both positive and negative outcomes (Blokker et al., 2019). Thus, this concept supports the consideration of career and family responsibilities and could positively inform ways in which organisational practices which take care of personal needs may bring about a more sustainable career for working women with children (Straub et al., 2020). Not only is the sustainability of careers important for an individual to manage their career, but also it relates to the quality of life possible for individuals despite the levels of uncertainty and levels of change which are increasingly prevalent in today's work context (Magnano et al., 2019). Individuals build a sustainable career within which they can develop and maintain their employability and wellbeing through their various career decisions (De Hauw & Greenhaus, 2014).

2.6. Career transitions and identity

The current research recognises and advocates taking a life course perspective to analysing the careers of women with children. Career transitions can be described as any move in, out of or between job(s) or any alteration in the context of work duties and activities (Nicholson & West, 1988). Career transitions may occur from education to first job, through promotion, redundancy, and retirement, or from a change in direction or in career trajectory due to lack of progress or movement in the previously expected direction (Juntunen et al., 2002). Career transitions can also occur due to personal factors such as having children, more likely to impact women than men not only due to pregnancy and maternity but also with caregiving remaining a mostly female responsibility (Coltrane, 2000). However, whilst women's careers are more likely to be non-linear, disjointed and interrupted than those of men's (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006) the reasons for this are not straightforward. Many women leave for reasons more complex than just family (Alshabani & Soto, 2020), some pushed out by inflexible workplace practices and lack of support (Lim & Rasdi,

2019, Williams et al., 2006) in one example just a third of the almost 500 respondents from the US cited children as their sole reason for leaving their workforce (Cabrera, 2007).

Transitions are usually characterised by experiences of novelty, ambiguity, and insecurity and the process of making sense of this transition is important (Sullivan & Ariss, 2021). How successfully women have reconciled subsequent changes, such as in their identities – both professional and maternal – has an impact not only on their choices, such as to leave the workplace, but also on how they perceive that choice. Research highlights the psychological costs of such choices including loss of identity and making sense of the decision afterwards (Kanji & Cahusac, 2015). The impact of this on working mothers, as with other groups, is important. In supporting a successful transition which creates a strong vision for the future, working mothers are more likely to remain engaged and committed to their organisations and more satisfied at work and home (Bothma et al., 2015).

The initial transition to motherhood is often considered a particularly sensitive time in relation to career decisions of working mothers (Gross-Spector & Cinamon, 2017), often covered in the literature with its focus on the impact of gaps in employment resulting from maternity leave (England et al., 2016). It is at the stage of the transition to motherhood when women may reduce the level of participation in the workplace (Ladge et al., 2012) and that their sense of self is evolving, as work and motherhood begin to overlap (Hennekam et al., 2019). Research proposes the transition of identity during this time may be split into three distinct stages: the professional identity, the pregnant woman identity and the mother identity, the latter emerging from as early as when a woman first learns she is pregnant (Greenberg et al., 2016). Here, women may be considering who they are, who they want to be and who others, such as the organisation, want them to be, as Greenberg and colleagues term identity-work in which women are attempting to create a vision for themselves based on their roles, whilst also making decisions about themselves and their work situation. The process of how to approach their 'return to work' after children including adapting to new identities can begin long before women become pregnant and may only

be considered complete when the women view themselves as fully integrated into their organisation (Grether & Wiese, 2016).

There are important later stages of motherhood and additional transitions which occur in a woman's life and career. The impact of having children on a woman's work or career does not stop after maternity leave has ended and women with children may experience a corresponding shift in self-concept alongside the changing age of their children highlighting the changing nature of motherhood (Lee et al., 2016). The combination of visible behaviours such as pregnancy and maternity leave have been associated with or interpreted by some as a reduction in commitment to work, and with mothers of older children not marked out in same way they are less affected and have received less research attention (Baldwin et al., 2008; Valcour et al., 2008). In relation to policy also, much of the research has been focused on parents of young children, whereas the parents of older children or indeed caring responsibilities aside from young children, perhaps for the elderly or disabled, is scarce (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2010). Some of the research on later career stages is based on quantitative analysis of national databases of employment and panel data (e.g., Fouarge et al., 2011; Gash, 2009; Kahn et al., 2014) lacking understanding of the underlying psychological factors (Ekin, 2007). Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) research revealed that women are more likely to stay in paid work in the years following their first child, with the rising proportion of working age mothers particularly high for mothers of pre- and primary-school age children (Roantree & Vira, 2017). Thus, more research into how various transitional phases may impact on careers, such as the effect of school age children, would be beneficial (Moen, 2005; Moen & Roehling, 2007). This PhD will focus attention on career decisions to uncover these factors and therefore understand the type of support required at different stages in women with children's career journey.

2.7. Focus of current study

Increasingly, the challenges of work life integration for both women and men are being recognised in the literature, however an understanding of the process by which women take

decisions regarding their career is still incomplete (Gross-Spector & Cinamon, 2017). In much of the literature on the factors influencing careers of working women including those with children, it is the wider, external drivers which are considered, such as the societal, cultural, or organisational factors. For example, gendered societal norms remain a strong influence, with the male partner as the primary earner and the female partner focused on childcare and household tasks (Trappe et al., 2015). Organisational policies can also play a significant role in the reinforcement of barriers and stereotypes, with research suggesting that lack of flexible working and poor organisational support accounts for much of the career disruption and penalties experienced by women with children in the workplace (Finer-Freedman, 2014) as well as impacting on the quality of part-time options available for women (Hegewisch, 2010). Certain positive factors such as managerial support has been identified as improving women's intent to stay in work (Ladge et al., 2018). Moreover, women are disadvantaged in their access to flexible working arrangements (Wheatley, 2016) and women with children have been constrained in access to quality part-time working options (Gash, 2008; Lyonette, 2015) and a lower penalty to motherhood found in countries with some form of policy designed to support working mothers (Gash, 2009). Governmental support has attempted but been less than successful in encouraging fathers to contribute equally to childcare or domestic duties (Baker, 2010) as despite the introduction of targeted initiatives in the UK such as shared parental leave in recent years, the rates of uptake and understanding remains low (Hutchings, 2017; TUC, 2019). Fathers may also believe that flexible working arrangements (FWAs) that have been introduced to reduce working hours are unavailable to them, compared with one-tenth of mothers (Cook et al., 2021).

There is an impact from the lower value of care work in society, across the world, which influences the careers of working mothers (Leahy & Doughney, 2006). The Centre for American progress, for example, reported that 'the childcare crisis is keeping women out of the workforce' (CAP, 2019). The charity Working Families concluded in their 2018 'Modern Families Index' report that childcare is a key factor in women's career choices and development (Working Families, 2018). Care work, essential for advancing human capabilities, is often undervalued, and taken for

granted, as it is typically unpaid (HDR, 2015, Antonopoulos, 2009). The estimated value of unpaid childcare in the UK in 2015 was £132.4 billion, with 69% of that value accounted for by females and mothers continuing to provide higher levels of childcare than fathers (Gershuny et al., 2016). Critics have suggested that equality in paid work is also dependent on equality in work that is unpaid, which includes parental caring responsibilities, and that rather than trying to make women's careers more like men's we should be looking instead at transforming men's working lives (Elson, 2017).

The explanation that working mothers are voluntarily choosing to 'opt out' of careers has also been challenged by subsequent research which uncovers barriers, including perceived violation of the 'ideal worker norm' (Weisshaar, 2018) lack of managerial support and maternal confidence (Ladge et al., 2018), and overlooking the adaptations required by individuals relating to gendered social norms and pressures within which such choices are made (Leahy & Doughney, 2006). This is due in part to the ideals which exist around the roles of mother and worker, where research points to "culturally constructed ... schemas of both work and family devotions" (Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009, p.321) which influence career decisions. This includes the influence of gendered beliefs around the traditional role of mother as carer, and father as worker (Deutsch & Gaunt, 2020), the ideal or so-called 'good mother' depiction of the self-sacrificing mother who stays at home rather than goes out to work (Stockey-Bridge, 2015). This 'good mother' ideal, recognised by many as describing a woman focused on family above all else – including work – gaining meaning from caregiving (Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Pederson, 2016). According to one researcher, even when one does not ascribe to the ideal, one may still be influenced by it (Hager, 2011). The origins of the concept may come, at least in part, from the concept of intensive mothering as discussed by Hays (1996) and reflects the pressure to conform to certain standards influencing women when they become mothers. It is proposed that women manage work family conflicts and negotiate career decisions with this notion of the good mother in mind, by for example, putting in a 'second shift', opting out of the workplace or slowing down career progress to fulfil these expectations (Buzanell et al., 2005). However, this concept constrains the choices of all women, with the status

of always being there excluding the working mother, and the identity outside of the home for working mothers excluding those choosing to stay at home (Johnston & Swanson, 2006).

2.8. Building on career and motherhood research

Despite some progress within organisations, the focus on the more traditional career approach persists (Baruch, 2006; Twamley, 2019) and the model of careers which exists within organisations continues to be based on the career patterns of working men (Biemann et al., 2012). This approach tends to best support a career which progresses in a traditional, hierarchical or 'ladder-like' manner, and develops through positions of increasing authority and status with few employment gaps, which is not the typical course of a woman's, much less a woman with children. The evidence also points to less boundaried careers, resulting in more movement between organisations, emphasising the importance of factors such as personal resources (Hirschi, 2012) as well as employability (De Vos et al., 2009) for career progress. In addition, it is important to consider the interplay between individual and organisation and investing in a career which will be more sustainable into the future of work (Van der Heijden et al., 2019). For women with children, despite some progress with regards equality of opportunity in the workplace (Madsen et al., 2020) most of the responsibility for caring responsibilities persists and women suffer various career penalties as a result (Daly, 2002; Gracia & Esping-Andersen, 2015; Young, 2018). The reasons for these penalties are complex, and previous research identifies contributions of lower wage outcomes to including factors such as human capital depreciation from the child-related gaps in careers, a family rather than work orientation, discrimination, or impact of policy and social context (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia, 2020). However, these have largely focused on the external and contextual factors (Bao et al., 2021) rather than uncover the internal, individual reasons behind decisions (Ekin, 2007).

While research has revealed women's reasons for leaving, with factors cited including feeling 'pushed out' due to pressures of violating norms (Trappe et al., 2015), lack of support (Williams et al., 2006; Lim & Rasdi, 2019) and low levels of confidence (Ladge et al., 2018), it has been pointed

out that it is also important to consider the reasons behind women's decisions to remain in the workplace (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011). Meanwhile, whilst individuals and organisations are attempting to address the inequalities and career penalties of motherhood on careers – including supporting initiatives to increase participation and promoting flexible working (Shanmugam & Agarwal, 2019; Working Families, 2019) such interventions may be overly focused on addressing the penalties' and consequences rather than the causes. Finally, research with working mother's points to the stronger influence of personal choice through which women exercise their career decisions, in contrast to the social and economic constraints which have been identified. As we have seen, a less boundaried career is one with less organisational attachment over the career, which emphasises individualisation (Akkermans et al., 2018; Hirschi, 2012), flexibility (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008), and the importance of investing in employability for future career success (De Vos et al., 2009; Rothwell & Arnold, 2005), therefore the notion of personal choice is a salient one. Furthermore, much of the literature on the motherhood penalty is objective, as well as fragmented (Zimmerman & Clark, 2016) with less empirical understanding of what occurs for women with children and how this differs to women without. Considering the individualisation of career decisions, and the importance of demonstrating or developing one's employability, an understanding of the influencing factors could help to support working mothers when navigating the challenges of balancing work and motherhood in making career decisions.

The current research aims to uncover the ways in which motherhood may impact on career decisions, with a focus on the psychological factors, rather than the outcomes. The purpose of which – and the motivating force behind this research – is to develop a deeper understanding of the reasons behind career decisions, which result in the career penalties outlined such as reduced pay or progression.

2.9. Thesis aims and objectives

As outlined in the introduction, the overall aim of this thesis is to investigate the ways in which motherhood impacts on women's career decisions with a focus on the psychological factors – an area which has received less attention in the literature – to address the following research questions:

1. What is known in the literature about the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers, post maternity through schooling?
2. How does motherhood influence the careers of working mothers, from their own perspective?
3. How do the psychological resources of self-efficacy resources impact on employability and career success for working women with and without children?

Taking a mixed methods approach (see chapter 3 for methodological approach), this PhD follows three stages in which to address these questions.

Stage 1: Initial literature review, to understand the landscape with regards to the impact of motherhood on careers of working women.

Stage 2: Concurrent mixed methods comprising three research studies

To build on the initial literature review and determine the current research base for the psychological factors impacting on career decisions this PhD will conduct a systematic review of the literature for the past two decades on the psychological factors impacting on career decisions for women with children (RQ1).

To understand the ways in which motherhood impacts on careers, this PhD will also conduct qualitative narrative interviews with working women with children to investigate the factors influencing their career decisions through a thematic analysis approach (RQ2).

To understand the interaction between psychological resources and career success, this PhD will investigate the relationships between self-efficacy, employability, and career success for women with and without children. This study will take a structural equation modelling approach to

understanding the ways in which these processes may be impacting on women with children's careers, compared to those without children (RQ3).

Stage 3:

In the third and final stage, the results of studies are considered to understand the ways in which this research has added to the existing evidence base.

These objectives are based on theoretical arguments presented in chapters 1 and 2, linking motherhood, career decisions and outcomes which will be further developed with the findings of the systematic review (chapter 4). Achieving these objectives will improve existing knowledge on the psychological factors impacting on women's career decisions and career success, which have thus far received less attention. By improving knowledge and understanding of the psychological factors impacting on women with children – in the context of contemporary careers largely driven by the individual – we hope to enable women with children to participate fully in the workplace, according to their own choice.

The next chapter reports further on the design and methods used to achieve the research aim and objectives.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The primary aim of research is the 'documentation, discovery and interpretation' for 'the advancement of knowledge', using scientific methods to produce evidence and results (Collis & Hussey, 2003). A methodology is the philosophical position at the core of understanding this knowledge, something which directly informs the strategy and thus the methods chosen, also linked to the desired research outcomes. It relates to epistemology and ontology, and all three concepts are referred to as the research philosophy or paradigm (Collis & Hussey, 2003), each one containing unique assumptions of reality and knowledge upon which distinctive research approaches are based (Scotland, 2012). For example, within mixed methods, the relevant Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological positions are adopted in a different way as compared to either a qualitative or quantitative approach. It is still equally important to understand these philosophical positions, and how they may be addressed as it would be in any study as failing to do so may mean the outcome of the study is not accepted (Dörnyei, 2007). This chapter first presents each of the philosophical positions respectively, followed by an elaboration on how they will be applied in this mixed methods research PhD.

3.2. Research Paradigm

3.2.1. *Ontology*

Ontology has been variously described as relating to the nature of what exists in the world and the assumptions of reality about them (Bryman & Bell, 2011), the study of being (Crotty, 2003), or the perception of the existence of man, society, and the world in general as well as the relationship among them (Gray, 2013). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989) ontological assumptions are those that respond to the question on what the nature of reality is.

The social reality that is our ontological perspective may be made up either of one reality (Bryman, 2004), or of multiple realities which co-exist (Bryman, 2007). Thus, a researcher may

choose and follow either position; the former would lead to objective investigation, the latter would require the aid of human experiences (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A researcher prescribing to the view that there is one objective reality would therefore be referred to as an objectivist, and one who considers themselves to see reality from the viewpoints of the participant as a subjectivist (Levers, 2013). The objectivist sees reality as distinct from or “independent of social actors” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.21) and would investigate it accordingly. The subjectivist researcher would ascribe to the view that reality is created and discovered (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and therefore would involve the participants to find out the ‘truth’.

In a mixed methods study, however, a researcher recognises an alternative ontological position which acknowledges the fact that both objective and subjective views of the reality are useful. It has been suggested that such a position on ontology, which underpins the mixed methods approach, may provide a more comprehensive depiction of the social phenomenon (Ansari et al., 2016). The mixed-methods approach will be discussed in more detail shortly, first a consideration of another facet of the next philosophical position, epistemology.

3.2.2. Epistemology

Epistemology relates to the way in which a researcher establishes or determines reality (Ansari et al., 2016). According to Crotty, (2003), epistemology is “a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know”, (Crotty, 2003, p.3). An epistemological position may helpfully be identified in response to the question, what the relationship between the research and the researcher is (Creswell, 2003). If the response to this is that one objective reality exists – separating researcher and subjects – then the epistemological path of the study, in broad terms, may be termed as positivism. A positivist view would assume that reality exists, and thus is not mediated by our senses (Scotland, 2013). On the other hand, if a researcher considers that research subjects may not be considered separate, then the study would be considered to follow the phenomenological or interpretivist epistemology. The theoretical perspective is defined as “the theoretical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and

grounding its logic and criteria.” (Crotty, 2003, p.7). In this way, the researchers view of reality impacts on the choice of research method, for example phenomenologists or interpretivists taking a subjective approach, examining the phenomena through the subjective eyes of the participants (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Positivists on the other hand, would emphasise explanation and proof (Maykut & Morehouse, 2002) taking an objective stance and analyse measurable variables (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

The positivist methodology is directed at explaining relationships, identifying causes which influence outcomes (Creswell, 2009). Following on from the positivism movement in the 20th century was post-positivism, which sought to maintain research objectivity and robustness, whilst recognising that knowledge is tentative, and with inclusion of participants’ perspectives also collected (Creswell, 2009). The interpretivist epistemology on the other hand suggests that meaning is not discovered, rather, it is constructed through the interaction between consciousness and the world. Thus, interpretivism maintains that individuals are at the same time shaping the world as experiencing it (Heron & Reason, 1997). Researchers from this position understand a phenomenon from an individual’s perspective, “looking at interaction among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts which people inhabit” (Creswell, 2009, p.8). Examples of interpretivist methodology are qualitative, including case studies, phenomenology, and ethnography (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Paradigms, methods, and tools

Paradigm	Methods (primarily)	Data collection tools (examples)
Positivist / post positivist	Quantitative. “Although qualitative methods can be used within this paradigm, quantitative methods tend to be predominant ...”	Experiments Quasi-experiments Tests Scales
Interpretivist / constructivist	Qualitative methods predominate although quantitative methods may also be utilised	Interviews Observations Document reviews Visual data analysis
Pragmatic	Qualitative and/or quantitative methods may be employed. Methods are matched to the specific questions and purpose of the research.	May include tools from both positivist and interpretivist paradigms. E.g., interviews, observations, and testing and experiments.

Adapted from Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), p.7

The current research is concerned, at least in part, with the human world of meanings and interpretations through the views and perceptions of working mothers, thus post-positivism is not considered the most appropriate research approach. While interpretivism could be a suitable theoretical perspective, a philosophical approach which is considered a more suitable fit is pragmatism for several reasons, which are outlined next.

3.2.3. Pragmatism

Pragmatism is defined as a “philosophical and epistemological framework for interrogating and evaluating ideas and beliefs in terms of their practical functioning” (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020, p.3). Its origins can be traced back to an emerging scepticism over the prevailing positivist scientific approaches and in a doubt that perfect knowledge was achievable (Ormerod, 2006). With roots tracing back to the time of classical thinking, Peirce (1878), suggested a more pragmatic approach to science which could be grounded in issues of human significance, rather than on the then popular debate about the nature of truth and reality. This approach evolved by recognising that human interpretation is inherent to our understanding and a clearer understanding of the social reality is possible by taking a thoughtful and systematic approach (Dewey, 1929). Pragmatism has since contributed to the development of methodologies including action research and grounded theory (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020).

Taking a pragmatic approach enables researchers to base choices on relevance of the methods to take us from theory to practice and vice versa (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). A pragmatic approach also puts the research problem at the centre, with all chosen approaches concerned with understanding the problem (Creswell, 2003). Both features are at the core of the current research. In addition, a pragmatic approach recognises the social context and provides a flexible and more reflexive approach to conducting research (Feilzer, 2010). Pragmatism offers a dynamic paradigm, which is in harmony with the complex and shifting context (Farjoun et al., 2015), as outlined in detail in the thesis introduction, women with children are navigating career decisions within a complex and shifting context, something which this thesis seeks to explore.

The pragmatic paradigm provides an opportunity to better explore connections between what is known and what is experienced in context and ultimately transforming practice (Biesta, 2010). This research does so by recognising the lived experience of working mothers through RQ1 which explores the evidence base from a variety of contexts through a systematic review of the literature to answer the question ‘What is known in the literature about the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers?’. A systematic review may incorporate either quantitative or qualitative data, and the nature of the research question and method of analysing the results to incorporate qualitative data and lived experience aligned with the interpretivist perspective (see 3.3.5.1.). This research also explores the direct lived experience of working mothers through RQ2: ‘How does motherhood influence the careers of working mothers, from their own perspective?’

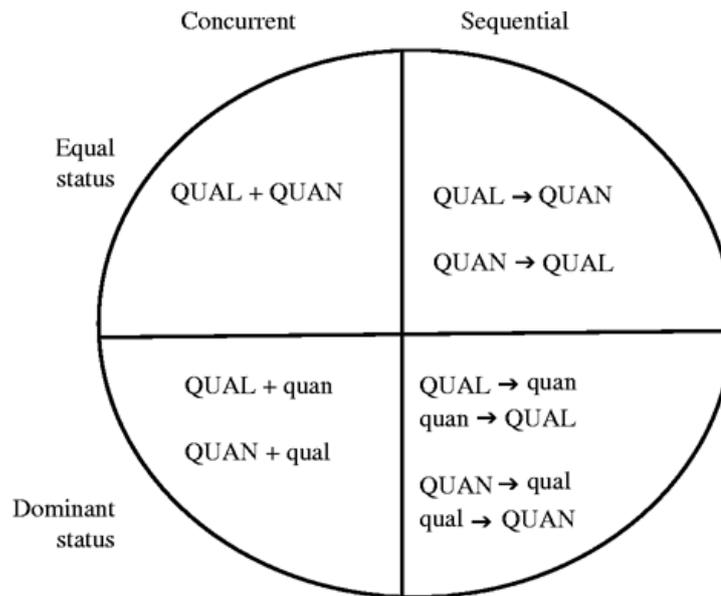
Finally, pragmatism views inquiry as an experiential process, it also emphasises actionable knowledge, by recognising the interconnectedness between experience (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). This is demonstrated through RQ3: How do the psychological resources of self-efficacy impact on employability and career success for working women with and without children?

3.2.4. *Mixed methods*

Mixed methods research (MMR) has gained popularity in recent decades, increasing rapidly over the past ten years, especially after 2006 (Timans et al., 2019). It combines qualitative and quantitative research methods, described as a third research paradigm emerging from the two, previously opposing, approaches of qualitative and quantitative research (Johnson et al., 2007). Certain philosophical issues arise in MMR as we have seen (see Table 3) qualitative research is generally associated with interpretivism, and quantitative research associated with positivism thus mixing methods may suggest the acceptance of multiple realities (Ma, 2012). Indeed, for some researchers there is “no real consensus regarding mixed method design—not even about what it is” (Morse, 2010, p. 483). More recently however, this debate has quietened and interest in combining studies increasing (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) with researchers across different disciplines including education and social sciences considering MMR as complimentary to the traditional approaches (Ma, 2012).

Some of the most common reasons for the use of mixed methods is to mitigate some of the downsides of the alternative; for example, qualitative research, due to the smaller sample size in that approach, may be less generalisable than quantitative, however qualitative provides a richer detail than its opponent. Furthermore, taking a mixed methods approach could provide additional credibility for the research, where results of qualitative and quantitative are taken together, and converge, thus strengthening the validity of the conclusions. Mixed-methods research is also considered relevant if there is a need to understand and confirm the social phenomenon at the same time (Ansari et al., 2016). The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the current research more adequately addresses meanings behind data for example from the qualitative study (Tenny et al., 2021), as well as to generalise from a group including wider perspectives through the quantitative study (Polit & Beck, 2010). More specifically using mixed methods enables the research to; take different perspectives, for example through the inclusion of women with and without children in the quantitative study (chapter 6); provide a more comprehensive view than either purely qualitative or quantitative; and to add to instrument data (QUAN) details about the context or personal experiences (QUAL).

In some forms of mixed methods priority or higher status may be given to one or another of the approaches, i.e., a mixed-methods study may be more qualitative or more quantitative, or it may have a more equal status approach where the use of both approaches is designed with equality in mind (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017), see Figure 3.



Notes: “Qual” stands for qualitative; “quan” stands for quantitative; “+” stands for concurrent; “→” stands for sequential; capital letters – “QUAL” and “QUAN” denote high priority or weight; lower case letters – “qual” and “quan” denote lower priority or weight

Sources: Adapted from Creswell (2003); Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004); Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998); Pansiri (2005, p. 202)

Figure 3.

Different types of mixed method research design. Source: Jogulu and Pansiri (2011) p.690

In this PhD, equal status is given to each of the methods applied, indicating that no one study was weighted more heavily than another study (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). As a developing researcher without a strongly developed identity or alignment with either quantitative or qualitative methods, I have chosen to take a more pragmatic approach, and consider the equal-status mixed methods approach to meet the goals of the research (Johnson et al., 2007). One of the benefits of taking a mixed methods approach, is also helping early career researchers to develop their skills (Jogulu & Pansiri, 2011).

3.3. Research design

Five rationales have been suggested when conducting mixed methods research (Greene et al., 1989; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004):

- Triangulation: applying different methods to confirm results.
- Complementarity: results of one method are used to confirm or strengthen results from a second method.
- Initiation: new findings or insights which encourage more novel research.
- Development: results from one method shaping another method.
- Expansion: widening the range of research through application of a variety of methods

By using different methods for different components of the research inquiry, the current thesis seeks to extend the breadth and range of enquiry, as well as for triangulation, as above. It does so by taking the approach to combine a systematic review of current literature in combination with qualitative interviews of lived experiences as well as quantitative study comparing women with and without children. The mixing of methods also allows for a fuller and richer picture (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

By adopting a mixed methods approach this research also seeks to utilise the strengths of both approaches to respond to the specific research questions (Bryman, 2006). A quantitative approach provides an opportunity to examine the current literature in a systematic and robust way (RQ1), as well as examine differences between groups, namely women with and without children, providing numerical understanding of any disparity and an opportunity to examine the relevant theory through quantitative methods, the patterns of behaviour and comparison between groups, of women with and without children (RQ3). Qualitative data enables the addition of participants, namely mothers, lived experiences to provide a rich picture of the psychological factors under investigation (RQ2 and 3). Bryman (2006) also reasons that the use of mixed methods provides an opportunity to reach what he terms completeness by developing a more comprehensive account of the area of enquiry, in this case to identify the psychological factors impacting on the career decisions of working mothers through a combination of existing empirical evidence and women's reported experiences.

3.3.1. Individual studies

As above, the current research takes a mixed-methods approach including qualitative and quantitative methods. The first study, a systematic review, may be quantitative or qualitative,

dependent on the topic, research question(s) and method of analysis. The systematic review focused on psychological factors and with the majority of included studies qualitative in nature, thus qualitative narrative analysis is applied (Popay et al., 2006). The second study, in chapter 5, is qualitative, based on narrative interviews and a qualitative approach to analysis in using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, the study in chapter 6 is based on a quantitative survey method, applying quantitative data analysis which includes structural equation modelling and includes qualitative data in the form of open text questions, analysed using content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

3.3.2. Overall thesis structure

This approach is following an equal status concurrent-exploratory design (see Figure 3 for types of mixed method research design). The overall design is explained in Figure 4, below and expanded in the next section on the overall structure of thesis.

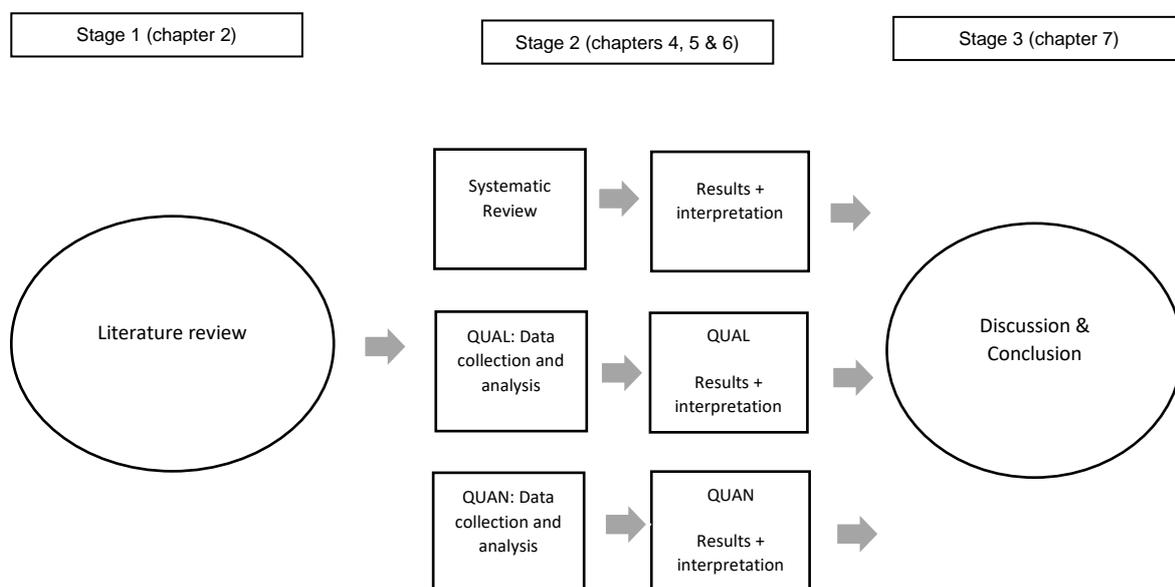


Figure 4.

Overall design of thesis including three stages of research: Concurrent mixed methods

Following the initial literature review (stage 1) the first study, a systematic review, was conducted and analysed as the first part of stage two (see chapter 4). Also in stage two, the qualitative and quantitative research studies were conducted concurrently, analysed, and

interpreted (chapters 5 & 6 for respective studies). Finally, in stage 3, the results of all studies were finally combined in the discussion and conclusion (chapter 7).

The overall structure of the mixed-methods research was planned to follow a three-stage process comprising a systematic review, interviews and survey conducted concurrently (see Figure 4 above for visual of overall structure). The research questions for the systematic review, qualitative and quantitative studies were developed through the findings of preceding literature review and by investigating the concept of psychological factors specifically focusing on this population within the literature, demonstrating the studies' concurrent and exploratory nature (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Additionally, as above, the interpretation of the data is presented in the discussion chapter. This approach sought to bring together the mixed methods analysis effectively through a concurrent approach whereby the literature review in chapter 2 identified initial themes and issues, which were explored in more detail in the systematic review to understand the current research landscape in more detail (see chapter 4), with qualitative interviews conducted to add the perspective of working mothers (see chapter 5) and a quantitative survey to explore some of the key psychological factors highlighted in the literature review, as well as providing an opportunity for a comparison between groups of women with and without children (chapter 6). The combination of each of these methods culminating with the final discussion adding richness and depth to the findings in combination (see chapter 7).

3.3.3. Data collection and analysis

As outlined in chapter 1, the thesis aims to address the gap identified through the research, relating to reasons behind women's decisions to remain in the workplace (Cooper & Mackenzie Davey, 2011) as well as reasons for leaving. Adding to this is consolidation of the fragmented research and introducing more richness and depth of analysis to the literature on the motherhood penalty (Zimmerman & Clark, 2016) by introducing a more empirical understanding of factors influencing women with children's career decisions and experiences, how this may differ to the perceptions of women without children in relation to certain psychological factors.

This will be achieved by developing a detailed understanding of the current research on this topic using a systematic review approach; a robust method of analysis designed to review and synthesise the research from the past two decades on the psychological factors which influence the career decisions of women with children (chapter 4). Alongside this, a qualitative study based on narrative interviews with working mothers is presented which explores in depth the ways in which motherhood influences the career decisions for a sample of working mothers in the UK (chapter 5). Next, in chapter 6, a quantitative research study, building on the themes identified by the literature review and looking specifically at perceptions of career-related personal resources, such as self-efficacy and employability, in the context of career success comparing women with and without children. The next section will describe the process(es) by which this is achieved in the research through the specific methods utilised, starting with an overview of systematic reviews, followed by qualitative interviews and finally quantitative surveys.

3.3.4. Choice of methods

3.3.4.1. Systematic review

A systematic review is defined as “a review of the evidence on a clearly formulated question that uses systematic and explicit methods to identify, select and critically appraise relevant primary research, and to extract and analyse data from the studies that are included in the review.” (CRD, 2001). This is distinct to a literature review, which involves an overview of literature pertaining to a topic. Table 3 presents the differences between a systematic and literature review.

Table 2.*Differences between a systematic review and a literature review*

	Systematic Review	Literature Review
Question	Focused on a single question	Not necessarily focused on a single question, but may describe an overview
Protocol	Includes a peer review protocol or plan	No protocol is included
Background	Provides summaries of the available literature on a topic	Provides summaries of the available literature on a topic
Objectives	Clear objectives are identified	Objectives may or may not be identified
Inclusion/exclusion criteria	Criteria is stated before review is conducted	Criteria is not specified
Search strategy	Comprehensive search conducted in a systematic way	Strategy not explicitly stated
Process of selecting articles	Process usually clear and explicit	Not described in a literature review
Process of evaluating articles	Comprehensive evaluation of study quality	Evaluation of study quality may or may not be included
Results and data synthesis	Clear summaries based on high quality evidence	Summary based on studies where the quality of the articles may not be specified. May also be influenced by the reviewer's theories, needs and beliefs
Discussion	Written by an expert or group of experts with a detailed and well-grounded knowledge of the issues	Written by an expert or group of experts with a well-grounded knowledge of the issues

Source: University of Newcastle Australia Library online (2022)

As outlined in Table 2, a systematic review involves carefully synthesized research evidence designed to answer focused questions summarising results from multiple research studies using the application of scientific methods (Stevens, 2001). The methods used should be reproducible and transparent (Siddaway et al., 2019). Using a systematic review, researchers may bring together findings from several studies to support understanding on a particular topic, and findings may highlight gaps in understanding, providing support for more research. Systematic reviews are more commonly used in the areas of health care, medicine, or education and less often in management and organisation studies (Briner & Denyer, 2012). However, as the field of Occupational and Organisational Psychology seeks to adopt an evidenced-based approach, this

process is highly suited (Daniels, 2019). In considering the choice of this method above others, their rigorous nature tends to mean higher quality of output, “more comprehensive, and less biased than other types of literature review” (Siddaway et al., 2019, p.752), and more likely to have an impact as the results of several studies combined necessarily goes far beyond any one of the individual studies (Cumming, 2014). For further details of the process undertaken, see section 4.2 in chapter 4.

3.3.4.2. Qualitative: Narrative interviews

Interviews are a popular form of qualitative research, with the semi-structured interview format dominating the field of data collection within the social sciences (Bradford & Cullen, 2012). Table 3 summarises the different types of interviews according to level of structure and purpose, demonstrating the various forms of interviews and highlighting the differences (Cassell, 2015).

Table 3.

Types and Purposes of interviews.

Level of structure	Type of interview	Purpose of interview
Structured	Information gathering	Gather attitude/opinion data that can be quantified for analysis
	Hypothesis testing	Gather data for quantification and theory testing
Semi-structured, thematic format	Exploratory	Gather information about a given topic
	Theoretical	Generate data to enable theory development
Semi-structured, distinctive format	Event based	Generate data through understanding how interviewees make sense of different events
	Comparative	Generate data through forcing the interviewee to make comparisons
	Narrative	Encourage interviewees to tell stories from their own perspective
	Biographical	Gain insights into the interviewee’s experiences through chronological reflection
	Visual techniques	Generate data by encouraging participants to project their own views or feelings onto a visual stimulus
Unstructured	Phenomenological	Gain insights into an individual’s lifeworld

Source: Cassell (2015), p.13

The method of interview in the qualitative study is the narrative interview, as above (see Table 3), a form of semi-structured interview which encourages interviewees to tell stories from their own

perspective (Cassell, 2015). In many forms of qualitative interviewing, such as semi-structured or structured, the emphasis is on a question-answer format, however the purpose of narrative interviews is to provide an opportunity for the participant to narrate their experience for the researcher (Allen, 2017). The narrative inquiry approach can also be beneficial due to the depth of the data gathered and the in-depth meaning behind the stories (Butina, 2015). The semi-structured narrative interview allows researchers to explore subjective views and gather in-depth accounts of people's experiences (Evans, 2018). One of the benefits of utilising such an approach is the flexibility, which enables researchers to consider experience and meanings as well as how these meanings may be influenced by wider discourses in society (Braun & Clarke, 2006) something which relates strongly to the current research topic. This represents the emphasis on the lived experience of the narrator and places the participants at the centre of the research (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). In addition, using an interview schedule, rather than a series of specific questions, the researcher can address the research question whilst also giving room for the participant to respond more freely and to bring up content relevant to them (Choak, 2012).

A narrative interview contains three stages (Feher, 2011), or four according to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2007), adding an earlier 'initiation phase' to describe the stage of describing the research and process of recording, prior to commencing the interview itself, although both authors emphasise the importance of interviewee being fully aware of the process and the focus of the interview by being fully briefed. To commence the interview, the interviewee is asked a pre-prepared, introductory question which has been carefully developed, then stays silent while the interviewee responds (Feher, 2011). This way the interviewee is free to remember and construct the story in their own way, in response to the question. Next, in a follow up phase, the interviewer may ask general prompting questions, if needed, such as if they remember anything else about certain events or situations from the narrative. The third and final stage is an optional narrative follow-up. Should the interviewer require more material for example, they conduct a follow up interview. The strengths of the narrative approach is that they can help investigate an individual's interpretation of their experience in the broader social context and interviewees can talk freely

(Mattingly & Lawler, 2000). Although they may also rely to some extent on the verbal skills and confidence of the interviewee (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). In addition, interviewees may adopt a strategic approach to their narrative, either to please the interviewer, or to reach some personal goal which is difficult to control for (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2007).

For further detail on the individual approach for this study, including details of the generative narrative question, see chapter 5.

3.3.4.3. Quantitative Surveys

The utilisation of a quantitative approach to the final study provided the opportunity to investigate the views from a group of working women, allowing for a larger sample of the population, as well as a comparison between women with and without children. The study was also designed with the purpose of understanding perceptions around specific psychological constructs which had been identified through a comprehensive review of the literature (chapter 2) and to add additional depth and meaning to understanding factors impacting on career decisions from the qualitative interviews running concurrently. These constructs included self-efficacy, employability, and career success. As the measures being used would be the source of the data the results would depend on the quality of those measures, hence existing, validated measures were chosen. Details of the individual measures are contained in chapter 6. According to Karpinska et al. (2015), the addition of quantitative surveys to qualitative research offers an opportunity to gather a wider range of information on context and attitudes.

This section has established the methodology and methods and next we consider how the relevant qualitative and quantitative data obtained will be analysed, in order to explore the research questions in depth.

3.3.5. Methods of analysis

3.3.5.1. Qualitative Narrative Analysis (for systematic review)

There are many different approaches which may be used to analyse the results of a systematic review, which depend on the nature of the research data and the research question. While

generally associated with quantitative methods such a meta-analysis, reviewing qualitative information in a similarly methodical and transparent way is equally possible (Siddaway et al., 2019). The first study in the current review takes one such qualitative approach, namely narrative analysis, to synthesise the results, involving identification of the “main, recurrent and/or most important themes and/or concepts across multiple studies” (Popay et al., 2006, p.18). This approach is appropriate when the review question does not specify research designs, as in this case, thereby allowing for a combination of quantitative and qualitative findings (Popay et al., 2006). In addition, this approach enables investigation of similarities and differences between studies, exploration of relationships and a summary of knowledge which may be utilised to inform practice or policy (Lisy & Porritt, 2016) revealing the narrative of the studies included in the review (Briner & Denyer, 2012).

3.3.5.2. Qualitative Thematic Analysis (for interviews)

As above, the semi-structured narrative interview gathers an in-depth account of people’s experiences (Evans, 2018) and the data provided will be analysed using a thematic analysis approach. At its most basic, thematic analysis can be described as a method for ‘identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data’ and through its freedom from certain theoretical constraints, “provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.5). An adaptable approach within the social sciences, it is suited to researchers taking either a realist or constructivist perspective (Evans, 2018). In the context of exploring career decisions of working mothers and the impact of motherhood, the relevance and wider applicability was important as well as the experience of the individual themselves. Thus, the data was interpreted on a semantic or explicit level, rather than at a latent or interpretative level (Boyatzis, 1998). This follows more of a realist, than a constructivist approach, which involved a straightforward interpretation of experience and meaning. This assumes that there is a simple, mostly one directional relationship between meaning and experience and language (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995).

In their comprehensive exploration of how (and how not) to conduct thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke explain that thematic analysis may take one of either an inductive (bottom-up) or a deductive (top-down) approach. The inductive approach involves coding the data without attempting to use a pre-existing framework or theoretical perspective, a data driven approach, although the authors underlying assumptions and beliefs will still influence the decisions made (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The current approach is inductive, it involves reading and re-reading the data for any themes related to motherhood and career and in this way would not take into account any previously identified themes from existing research. This again highlights the concurrent mixed-methods approach. The process of conducting the analysis then develops, from the initial coding, through to organising the data to understand patterns, through to interpretation which involves a more detailed consideration of the results, including their broader meanings and implications (Patton, 1990).

3.3.5.3. Quantitative Structural equation modelling (for surveys)

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is quantitative research technique used to show the causal relationships between variables which represents a specific research hypothesis based on a combination of factor analysis and multiple regression. It is recognised as a multivariate technique commonly used by psychologists (Hershberger, 2003). A SEM is a hypothesised pattern of linear relationships among a set of measurement and latent variables which is most often utilised to account for variation and co-variation of the measurement variables (MacCallum & Austin, 2000). This approach has several strengths which make it popular, for example, it controls measurement errors and handles several dependent variables (Chang et al., 2009). This includes the existence of the measurement and structural model, based on separate estimates of relations among both measured and latent in the former and among constructs, i.e., between latent variables only, in the latter. Researchers are able to assess the psychometric properties of measures using SEM as well as estimate relations among constructs while taking into account biases attributable to random error and variance (Bollen 1989), although this is conditional upon methodological factors within the individual study (Tomarken & Waller, 2015). However, that the error associated with the latent

variables is statistically estimated and removed is a key benefit of SEM over other approaches, as well as to allow testing the fit of a specified model to the data, which is closely align with the relevant theory, something which this approach uniquely provides. For specific details on the method of analysis in the quantitative study see chapter 6.

3.4. Research Ethics

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) ethics “express the professional values foundational to the profession” (APA, 2021) and in the UK, the BPS define research ethics as “the moral principles guiding research from its inception through to completion and publication of results” (BPS, 2021). The APA and BPS produce code of ethics which provide professional psychologists with the guidance necessary to protect the individuals and groups with whom they interact. These codes also inform relevant parties including the public on the ethical standards of the discipline (APA, 2021; BPS, 2021).

Society’s expectation of accountability in relation to research ethics has increased (Zegwaard et al., 2017) and the cornerstone of ethical research remains ‘informed consent’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Informed consent requires that participants receive all relevant information about the research in terms of what will be required, how the data will be used and any potential consequences relating to or resulting from their participation. It is important that participants provide active consent with full understanding of the details around withdrawing consent. In this way informed consent can be viewed as a contract between the researcher and the participant and equally relevant for internet mediated research as other methods (BPS, 2017).

It is essential therefore that certain information is provided to participants to ensure full and informed consent, which include but are not limited to; details of voluntary participation, the purpose of the research, any risks or discomfort which may result from participation (physical or psychological), research procedures, relevant contact details and right to confidentiality and withdrawal. Appropriate conduct includes protecting participants from harm, by ensuring anonymity and protecting the confidentiality of the data gathered (Chilisa, 2005).

In each study, ethics were protected through the conventions of voluntary participation, informed consent and confidentiality and anonymity. This is in line with the University guidelines and all research was subject to scrutiny through the University ethics process. Additionally, as a member of both the British Psychological Society (BPS) and as a Practitioner Psychologist (Occupational) registered with the Health Care and Professions Council (HCPC), the researcher is also bound by the standards of behaviour set out in their respective codes of professional conduct.

Some examples of professional ethical conduct include research participants choosing how much information about themselves they wished to reveal such as through optional questions in the quantitative study, and in the qualitative interviews study, using a narrative open question format. When recruiting participants for the studies, participants were asked to contact the researcher if they were interested, thus no direct contact was made to gain their participation in research.

No coercion took place during this research, nonetheless it is acknowledged that the researcher had some professional working links and familiarity with a small number of the interviewees in the qualitative research (see chapter 5 for more detail) and this might have had an indirect or direct impact on participation. Within this research, the tasks that are undertaken by participants were not viewed as putting the participants in a risky or harmful situation, either physically or psychologically (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The research was governed at all times by Northumbria University Guidelines and full ethical approval has been granted in accordance with Northumbria University policy which can be viewed in full [here](#).

3.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter mapped the landscape of methodology and research methods to establish the nature of the current research, inform the way in which the research is undertaken, and the data analysed. Having established the relevant methodological, ontological, and epistemological underpinnings for the current study, the chapter also explained the value in adopting a mixed methods approach, highlighting the strategic fit between the systematic review, qualitative

narrative interviews, and quantitative survey. The epistemological approach of interpretivism was set out, however in acknowledging that perceptions of unpredictability and subjectivity are an inherent part of research of this type, the pragmatic approach was chosen as the most relevant to the current study. In adopting a pragmatic paradigm of inquiry, the study recognises the importance of balancing the positivist view of research with the practical understanding and recognition of lived experience, due to the research aim to develop an understanding of the experience of working mothers in navigating their career decisions.

As above, the different options available to researchers have been explored with an emphasis placed on the methods that have been chosen and a rationale is provided for those choices. The methodological approach of mixed methods was identified as the most appropriate approach due to its alignment with pragmatism and the current research questions. By deploying a mixture of qualitative (thematic analysis) and quantitative (structural equation modelling) analytic approaches, the study design addresses the stated research aim and research questions, necessary to meet the requirements for doctoral study, which is to contribute new knowledge. In addition, it is believed that the complexity of the experiences and perceptions of working mothers in contemporary careers are unable to be fully investigated without acknowledging the value of both qualitative and quantitative data.

Chapter 4: A systematic review and thematic synthesis of the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers over two decades (1999-2020)

4.1. Introduction

As outlined in chapters 1 and 2, previous research has indicated that the careers of women suffer disadvantages in the workplace in comparison to their male counterparts, with added negative impact for women with children, referred to as the 'motherhood penalty' (Correll et al., 2007; Luhr, 2020; Morgan, 2015). Career penalties for mothers are many and varied most prominently the pay gap or lower wages (Budig et al., 2012; Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysiak, 2020) but also including reduced or absent promotion prospects (Benard et al., 2008) or the restriction of career progression for example due to frequency of insecure, part time or flexible roles (McIntosh et al., 2012). Childcare responsibilities can result in increased absenteeism in the workplace, which further impedes progression and negatively influences perceptions of commitment (Gale, 2013). Research has also suggested that women, and in particular mothers, are more likely to be perceived negatively in terms of productivity and commitment to the workplace (Chung, 2020). Women's career prospects can be affected by how long they spend away from the workplace, with evidence suggesting that the sooner women return to work, the better their longer-term career prospects (Aisenbrey et al., 2009) and that decisions around length of maternity leave can have negative consequences in the workplace (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017). Such factors place additional burden on the decision when, as well as whether, to return to work following childbirth.

Much of the career theory literature is still based on traditional careers and on research focusing on a working male population. Research has considered factors such as mobility (Nagy et al., 2019), employability (Williams et al., 2015), and the impact of individual factors on career decisions (Hirschi, 2012). While more recent theories such as the kaleidoscope model of careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006) take these specific circumstances into account, there is less emphasis on the

specific factors influencing the decisions for women in the career/motherhood transition, instead the focus is on the differences themselves. In addition, whilst attempts have been made to examine and explain the differences in career experiences for women with children the focus tends to be on external or more material factors at the detriment of the psychological and decision-making factors which may also be influential (Bao et al., 2021; Grether & Wiese, 2016; Noon & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020). Contemporary career theory suggests careers have become more self-directed in nature, reinforcing the importance of individuals in career decision-making (Hirschi, 2012; Rojewski et al., 2017; Sultana, 2010). In addition, there is a growing understanding that the patterns of women's careers do vary in comparison to that of men's (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006) and that women's careers are impacted due to having children, however it is considered that more research into the ways in which this occurs is needed (Han et al., 2018; Tomlinson et al., 2018; Woolnough & Redshaw, 2016). The literature around women's career decisions has also been labelled as disconnected and spanning multiple disciplines (Zimmerman & Clark, 2016), indicating it could be helpful to consolidate it.

Encouragingly for those who do wish to engage more in the workplace, women continue to make up a significant proportion of workers. The UK for example reported 72.5% of women compared to 80.5% of men aged 16-64 were in employment in March 2020 (ONS, 2020). Numbers which support the continued importance of supporting women to engage more in the workplace, further contributing to economic success. It is also important to understand the reasons behind the differences between men and women's experiences in the workplace. Researchers looking at later career stages have often focused on quantitative measures of difference rather than on the psychological aspects (Ekin, 2007) and additional understanding of the evidence at later phases, including when children are in school, would be valuable (Moen, 2005; Moen & Roehling, 2007). The current study aims to address these gaps by systematically reviewing the literature to identify the current research on the factors influencing the career decisions and provide more context for working women with children in navigating career decisions throughout the course of their career.

The current review will synthesise the findings from research over recent decades into the career decisions of working mothers and to present the findings to understand the specific factors influencing them. To do so in a consistent way a systematic review approach was adopted to bring together research from multiple studies, using pre-defined aims and objectives (Higgins & Green, 2011; Nightingale, 2009). The research question for this review was developed with the initial literature review for this thesis, identified as 'What is known in the literature about the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers, post-maternity throughout schooling?'

4.2. Study Methodology

A systematic review protocol or plan, was developed to provide a comprehensive description of the proposed systematic review, including the rationale, hypothesis and the methods intended to follow (Higgins & Green, 2011). The protocol was prepared before the review started utilised as a set of principles and project plan (Briner & Denyer 2012). The protocol outlined plans developed at the outset for eligibility criteria, search strategy, data extraction and synthesis (Higgins & Green, 2011). This section begins with a detailed description of the search strategy including inclusion and exclusion criteria, followed by the details of data extraction and data synthesis.

4.2.1. Search strategy

A computerised literature search was conducted of the following databases: Web of Science, Scopus, Business source premier, ProQuest (see Table A1 in appendices). These databases were chosen in consultation with an academic librarian, related to relevance to the research topic and breadth. The search parameters were: (Mother* OR maternal (Ab)) AND (Career OR work OR occupation OR job OR employment OR vocation* OR profession* (Ab)) AND (Decision OR decide OR choice OR choose OR explor* OR prefer* OR sensemak* OR transition OR option* (Ab), where ab=abstract) (see Table A2 in appendices). The keyword searches were derived by the primary researcher in consultation with research team, additional subject matter experts including academic librarians, based on the research question, covering suitable and relevant terms for the

three key concepts of 'mother', 'career', and 'decision'. This search strategy was tested by checking search for the recall of key references (Bramer et al., 2018); such as Halrynjo and Lyng (2009) identified through the initial literature review.

Only studies published in English since 1999 were sought; this was decided based on shifts in attitudes and approaches to work and the climate within the workforce following the millennium (McOrmond, 2004). Articles were included if they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria defined by the research team and outlined in Table 4. A software tool (EndNote®) for publishing and managing references was used to store and manage the studies identified.

Table 4.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Psychological factors (thoughts, feelings, beliefs) and their relationships with decisions (choices, considerations) and outcomes (impact on career/work)	Data driven, non-psychological data, Financial/economics, time surveys
Post maternity leave	During pregnancy, maternity (or immediately following maternity leave, due to the variable nature of maternity leave across different countries), breastfeeding-focused
Peer-reviewed articles	Grey literature and non-empirical
Employed, Professional, 'White collar' workers	Welfare, 'blue-collar', low-income/'welfare to work' (state funded income)
Career decisions of working mothers	Focused on policy, organisational factors or organisational culture, or other choice/decision e.g., timing of children, working fathers
Children aged under 18	Adult children (post-18/University)
Work context	Women in context of studying
Women in partnership, marriage or marital status not described	Focus of study is single parenthood, single-sex couples
Dated after 1999	Any studies pre-1999, or data which pre-dates 1999

4.2.2. Data extraction

Papers published in the English language, empirical studies, in peer-reviewed journals were selected for inclusion. Once duplicates were removed, only papers that included the career decisions of working mothers (post-maternity) with psychological factors, were included for an

abstract screening (Polanin et al., 2019). In any case where eligibility was not clear from the abstract, those papers were included in a full paper review. The primary reviewer conducted the first two stages (duplicates, title search) following the eligibility criteria, recording decisions using an electronic database. Following this, abstract searches were conducted, and decisions recorded in tabular form. A second reviewer then independently checked 50 % of the results of papers included in the abstract search, also recording decisions (Williams et al., 2016). Any lack of agreement over inclusion was discussed and resolved by consensus following a pre-defined procedure of “referring to the inclusion and exclusion criteria and relevant theoretical and empirical issues” (Siddaway et al., 2019, p.761). A third reviewer was brought in to provide their view as to the eligibility of disputed papers for the final stage. Following the full text screening, all final included papers were reviewed in full by the second and third reviewer. Results of the data extraction process is reported using a PRISMA flowchart to show the flow of information through the different phases of the systematic review from initial identification, through screening, eligibility to the included studies (see Appendix A, Figure A1).

4.2.3. Synthesis

As described in the overall methodology, a narrative analysis was performed to synthesise the results to systematically identify the “main, recurrent and/or most important themes and/or concepts across multiple studies” (Popay et al., 2006, p.18). Data extraction of the selected studies was carried out using directly reported data (qualitative or quantitative) as well as author interpretations. Text labelled as ‘results’ or ‘findings’ in the study reports were considered as study findings and analysed by the primary reviewer to identify themes within the literature (Popay et al., 2006). To begin, the researcher conducted a manual coding of the findings of primary studies using text directly relevant to the research question. Next, these codes were grouped together and organised into related areas to create descriptions of the data, leading to the final step, developing analytical themes (see Appendix B for example from process of developing analytical themes). The stage of developing analytical themes represents the data going beyond the content of the original studies, and of using these descriptive themes to directly answer the review question

(Thomas & Harden, 2008). The extracted studies were examined using a process for assessing the quality of studies (see 4.3.2. for more on this quality assessment). As a result of the narrative analysis process outlined, the ten analytical themes identified across the selected studies are: 1) Opportunity/choice; 2) Shifting priorities; 3) Perceptions of others/ideals; 4) Personal resources; 5) Autonomy/control; 6) Challenge/Meaning; 7) Family needs; 8) Feelings; 9) Support from others; and 10) Sacrifices. These are expanded below (see 4.3.4.). Lastly, the themes within each study were also analysed in relation to career decision, to supplement the influences (themes) identified by the narrative synthesis and to address the research question (see 4.3.4.2.).

4.3. Results

A computerised literature search was conducted in October 2020 following criteria outlined above, which identified 23,833 studies in total across all included databases (see Table A1 in appendices for full list). This represents a relatively high number of studies, partly explained due to numbers of duplicates, although provided some reassurance that sufficient saturation of the available material was reached (Hawker et al., 2002). Once duplicates were removed, a total of 11,490 papers were available for the first screening. This stage removed papers based on title (10,821). Examples of recorded reasons for exclusion from title search included: 'stress related – young women and transition to adulthood', 'commuting experience for childcare reasons' and 'childcare choices.' The next stage involved a search of abstracts, with 497 removed. Some examples of recorded reasons for exclusion from this stage included: 'Not focused on career decisions and outcomes', 'looks at occupational 'shapes' of different roles, and their impact on security and career access', 'focused on young women, not psychological factors, used longitudinal data patterns'. Finally, a full text review of the remaining 172 studies resulted in exclusion of 157 papers; excluded because the full paper indicated elements which did not meet the study inclusion criteria. Exclusion from this stage included 'looks at decision to have children, not experience of working mothers', 'Focused on childcare, use of domestic help, productivity. Very little on career decisions', 'focus on childcare policy and its impact', and 'data driven – not psychological factors'. See Figure A1 'flow chart' of results, for further examples of reasons for exclusion.

In total, 15 studies were included in final analysis (Figure A1 in Appendix A shows stages and details). The final extracted articles in date order were Jackson and Scharman (2002), Marks and Houston (2002), Rubin and Wooten (2007), Grady and McCarthy (2008), Halrynjo and Lyng (2009), Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011), Duberley and Carrigan (2013), Ruitenberg (2014), Lewis et al. (2015), Stockey-Bridge (2015), Rushing and Sparks (2017), Foley et al. (2018), Lim & Rasdi (2019), Whittington (2019), Breen and Leung (2020).

4.3.1. Study characteristics

Extracted articles were published between 2002 and 2020, the majority (ten) after 2011. Five of the studies took place in the United States (Jackson & Scharman, 2002; Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Rushing & Sparks, 2017; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011; Whittington, 2019), two in Australia (Foley et al., 2018; Stockey-Bridge, 2015), two in the United Kingdom (Marks & Houston, 2002; Duberley & Carrigan, 2013) and one respectively in Canada (Breen & Leung, 2020), Ireland (Grady & McCarthy, 2008), Malaysia (Lim & Rasdi, 2019), The Netherlands (Ruitenberg, 2014), New Zealand (Lewis et al., 2015) and Norway (Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009). Studies thus represent some variety in culture and social contexts, see discussion for more consideration of cultural differences. Most studies used primary data, one a mixture of primary and secondary (Lewis et al., 2014) and one utilising data from a larger previous study carried out in 2014 by one of the authors (Breen & Leung, 2020). Thirteen studies utilised qualitative data (mainly interviews) with the remaining two involving quantitative survey data (Marks & Houston, 2002) one with qualitative questions (Whittington, 2019).

Extracted data including the research type, country, participants, research questions, theories/constructs applied, findings and limitations were presented for all studies (Newman & Gough, 2020), as presented in Table 5.

Table 5.*Summary of 15 extracted studies including characteristics, context, quality, and original findings*

Authors (year)	Research (type)	Host country	Participants	Research Question(s)	Theories/ constructs applied	Findings	(Author's) Limitations
Jackson and Scharman (2002)	Qualitative interviews, guided, in-depth	United States	26 married mothers in 'family friendly careers' (ages 28 to 48)	How do women regard their experience of identifying and constructing a 'family friendly career'?	Stress from combining two jobs	Psychological factors include: Seeking and creating meaning and satisfactions. Experiencing 'Good' stress (juggling). Tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty. Surprised by feelings of enjoyment, unexpected	Sourced from researchers' network of associates and referrals
Marks and Houston (2002)	Questionnaire survey -	United Kingdom	119 survey responses- mothers full-, part-time and not working	Exploring attitudes to work and family	Hakim 'preference theory'. Positive and negative attitudes at same time (Kaplan, 1972).	Findings indicate that one reason women work is their commitment to working role and another reason is they find motherhood boring, exhausting, stressful and socially isolating.	Not directly measuring work commitment. Demands and consequences may be different for different women.
Rubin and Wooten (2007)	Interviews, in depth, open ended	United States	10 Full time stay at home mothers (ages 35-48)	How did you decide to stay at home with your children? (also explored benefits/ challenges)		Themes include conflict around 'not doing anything well', loss of self/identity, of validation and societal 'value'.	Snowball sampling (chain type)
Grady and McCarthy (2008)	Qualitative interviews, in depth	Ireland	18 professional working mid-career mothers (ages 37-55)	How do mid-career professional working mothers perceive, experience, merge and make meaning of their work/family roles?	Scarcity theory (time energy attention as 'finite') Meaning ascribed to roles of work, family and self (meaningful work). Kaleidoscope career model (KCM)	Family as priority but career is highly significant. Intellectual stimulation, creativity and achievement are motivations, integrated with a 'deep sense of motherhood'. Meaningfulness comes from ability to integrate family & work roles	Convenience/ snowball sampling
Halrynjo and Lyng (2009)	Qualitative interviews, in depth, exploratory	Norway	14 women with children (lawyers/ consultants)	What are the processes, circumstances, and discourses of the shift from high-commitment careers to family friendly jobs	Work and family devotion schemas In addition: Hakim's preference theory & Constraint based theory	Initially, attempt at 'maximizers' (commitments in both spheres). Then 'satisficers' (replaceable / combine both roles). Overcome constraints but violate schema of work devotion. Following schema of family devotion provides both an alternative source of commitment / self-worth	Selected from different firms and non-related social networks

Authors (year)	Research (type)	Host country	Participants	Research Question(s)	Theories/ constructs applied	Findings	(Author's) Limitations
Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011)	Qualitative interviews, in depth	United States	23 women, wide career (ages 30 – mid 40s)	Exploring 'opting in-between' (balancing work and family)	Super's theory of vocational development. Savickas (2005) self-constructed perception of career in life stories and themes. Kaleidoscope career model (KCM) / Boundaryless career	Shifting paradigm of balance from equality to fit. Balance includes positive factors (e.g. enrichment)	Snowball sampling (flyers distributed stating criteria to Doctors and childcare centres)
Duberley and Carrigan (2013)	Qualitative interviews	United Kingdom	20 entrepreneur mothers (ages 32 – 43)	How they construct their experiences of the move into entrepreneurship. (also, making sense of the transition & perceived challenges)	Self-employment as either 'liberation' or 'marginalisation' Societal career discourse – from 'embodied, gendered and unequal' positions	Freedom, flexibility of work schedule and control. Work and motherhood can be entwined and mutually beneficial. Self-limiting not to grow the business until children are older.	Mixed and emergent sampling strategy – both purposive and snowball.
Ruitenbergh (2014)	Semi-structured interviews ('Oral life history interviews')	Netherlands	39 mothers mixed education marital status, employment (aged 30-48)	Exploring 'narratives of choice'	Comparing attitudes/ personal preferences Against employment behaviour (e.g. Hakim preference theory)	A 'narrative of acceptance' and privatisation of inequality in unpaid labour arises, although subtle differences in beliefs/attitudes exists across groups differentiated by working patterns	'Weak ties' approach, e.g. participants from social environment of the researcher.
Lewis et al. (2015)	Qualitative longitudinal research	New Zealand	Four entrepreneur women	How life stage events such as motherhood can influence perception and enactment of careers.	Boundaryless career construct. Self-employment as 'dual pathway' to 'meaningful engagement with economic empowerment and maintenance of familial obligations'.	Boundaryless careers are a complex, dynamic, and ever-changing socially rooted problem. Inkson (2006) = boundary-crossing career. Re-crafting boundaryless to 'partially-boundary careers'.	Very small sample size (N=4) however longitudinal design (4 years). Exploratory, allowing for themes to emerge.
Stockey-Bridge (2015)	Ethnographic fieldwork- semi-structured interviews, participant observation	Australia	7 mothers attending playgroup, middle class.	How mothers negotiate paid work and childcare during their first year of motherhood.	Good mother ideology ('self-sacrificing agent of morality'). Betsy Wearing (1984) four groups of 'ideal type' mothers.	Tensions between role of 'ideal mother' and 'ideal self' persists. Employed mother who chooses to work is questioned. ('ideal mother' puts her family/children first). Not adhering creates guilt.	Homogeneity of the participants, one area, all mothers.

Authors (year)	Research (type)	Host country	Participants	Research Question(s)	Theories/ constructs applied	Findings	(Author's) Limitations
Rushing and Sparks (2017)	Qualitative phenomenological study	United States	20 married women working full time (husbands full-time at home).	Exploring decision making factors for a stay-at-home father (from working mother's perspective).	Gender theory	Creating balance, cost-benefit rationale. Applying personality / trait strengths	Recruited via online postings. Limited to those on Internet and connected to relevant support groups (may be representative of those already receiving more social support)
Foley et al. (2018)	Qualitative interviews (by telephone)	Australia	60 entrepreneur mothers (ages 25-59)	How entrepreneur mothers experience independence (as a motivator).	Self-employment as a reaction to 'organisational cultures' which force choice between commitment to work or to family	Themes include: Difficulty securing flexibility of time and location to meet the demands.	Uses social media groups (authors claim study was not designed to produce a random sample, but locate individuals with direct relevant experience, without presupposing characteristics)
Lim and Rasdi (2019)	Qualitative semi structured interviews	Malaysia	10 Married women professionals	What are the factors influencing decisions to leave the workplace (opt out or pushed out)	Kaleidoscope career model (KCM)	Feelings of guilt, Lost confidence. Focus is on whether these are 'opt out' or 'push out' factors	Small sample size
Whittington (2019)	Online survey with descriptive and qualitative questions	United States (may be other countries – not stated explicitly)	83 mothers working or worked in outdoor education (OE)	Why leave career in OE following children, how they navigate their career with children	Feminist research approach (e.g. seeking social change, being reflexive)	Choices included leave/ stay/ adapt. Self-constrained advancement. Limit time away due to perceived negative judgements/ guilt. Short term change leads to future success.	Limited information on participants details (basic demographics). Focused on specific role which may not translate to other professions.
Breen and Leung (2020)	Qualitative method using existing grounded theory study	Canada	13 mother entrepreneurs, middle class, post-secondary education, married	How does the mothering role influence the transition to entrepreneurship (RQ1)	Relational perspective of career-life development, including women's development centred around connections (Miller 1976) and four tenets of relational cultural paradigm (Schultheiss, 2003)	Opportunity exploitation & development (time of change and transition). Autonomy, choice, value driven. Constrained development temporarily (keep business smaller) May change in future	Small sample, Canadian context, middle class sample

4.3.2. Quality of extracted research studies

Assessing the quality of quantitative data studies in systematic reviews is better defined in the literature than that of qualitative data (Carroll & Booth, 2015). However, as most studies extracted for the current review were based on qualitative data, a specific critical appraisal tool developed by Hawker et al. (2002) was applied. This approach uses nine questions, to examine the methodological rigour of the included studies covering areas such as method, ethics and usefulness rated on a five-point scale from good to very poor. Results of this analysis indicated that all studies received good or fair ratings (apart from one rating of very poor where no abstract was available) across all elements indicating a high level of quality (Table A3 in Appendix A).

4.3.3. Participant Characteristics

In all, 466 women with children were involved in the included studies. The number of participants within individual studies ranged from 4-119 (see Table 5). Two survey studies had higher participant numbers (N=119, 83), with the majority including less than 40. Further, just one study was based solely on quantitative data (Marks & Houston, 2002). The studies included mothers involved in various forms of careers including employed and self-employed, working full-time or part-time, as well as some mothers who had recently left employment, from a mixture of professions, primarily representing roles requiring formal educational qualifications. This was in line with the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The demographic profile of study participants taken from all papers included age range from 22 through to 59, with the majority between mid-30's and mid-40's (see Table 5).

4.3.4. Thematic narrative synthesis

The review aimed to identify the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers. As outlined previously, a process of thematic narrative analysis was followed including moving from descriptive data (direct quotes from studies such as in Table 6 below) through analytical themes across studies to the final theme (see appendix B for example). Results of analysis identified ten analytical themes: 1) Choice; 2) Resources; 3) Autonomy; 4) Relationism; 5)

Family needs; 6) Meaning; 7) Feelings; 8) Ideals; 9) Changes over time; and 10) Sacrifices. See Table 6 for descriptive theme and examples with final themes described in detail in the next section 4.3.4.1.

Table 6.

Analytical themes, descriptive themes, and example(s) from extracted studies

Analytical theme	Descriptive theme	Example(s) – using directly reported (DR) data from participants or author interpretations (AI)
Choice	Availability of opportunity or choice in decisions, including compromises	‘They are forced to leave the workforce, and this is not due to their voluntarily opt-out’ (AI) – Lim & Rasdi, 2019, p.793 ‘Organisational cultures forced women to choose’ (AI) – Foley et al., 2018, p.324
Self/ Resources	Using own resources in relation to decisions, including influence of personal factors such as self-efficacy, values, beliefs	‘They are assessing their values’ (AI) – Grady & McCarthy, 2008, p.611 “ <i>I didn’t think I wanted to lose part of me</i> ” (DR) – Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011, p.339
Autonomy	Autonomy / control, flexibility, independence	‘Entrepreneurship became a way to satisfy both personal and career aspirations through having autonomy to adjust their schedule’ (AI)- Breen & Leung (2020)
Relationism	Making decisions in consultation with others, with social support / in a relational way.	“ <i>I worked with my manager and supervisor at the time to see if I could work out a ... schedule</i> ” (DR) – Jackson & Scharman, 2002, p. 182 ‘Parents are working together to identify what arrangement will work best’ (AI) – Rushing & Sparks, 2017, p.1266
Family needs	Influenced by and considering the needs of the family including impact of decisions on children	“ <i>I think that staying at home is a real advantage for giving that kind of relationship [with children]</i> ” (DR) – Rubin & Wooten, 2007, p.340
Meaning	Desire for challenge and meaning from work, gaining meaning from work	Work was meaningful and personally very satisfying (AI)- Jackson & Scharman, 2002, p.183
Feelings	Influence of positive and negative feelings in relation to experience of mothering, work, or role tensions.	“ <i>I’m embarrassed that I don’t work</i> ” / “ <i>I do get a little guilty about [not working]</i> ” (DR) – Rubin & Wooten, 2007, p.341 “ <i>If I do go back to work, I would feel incredibly guilty</i> ” (DR) – Stockey-Bridge, 2015, p.92
Ideals	The beliefs around perceptions of others or ideals held including the ‘good mother’	‘The idea of the ‘ideal’ or ‘natural’ role of the mother as the self-sacrificing stay-at-home-mother seems to prevail’ (AI) – Stockey-Bridge, 2015, p.92
Changes over time	Change or shifts in priorities over time	‘The schema of family devotion provides an alternative source of meaning, identity and fulfilment’ (AI) – Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009, p.334
Sacrifices	Consideration of sacrifices or losses on career and family	‘All of the women agreed that they would not want the business to expand to the extent where it challenged their ability to be available to their children’ (AI) – Duberley & Carrigan, 2013, p.638 An individual responsibility... that entailed a significant degree of personal trade-offs and sacrifices (AI) – Foley et al., 2011 p. 320

4.3.4.1. Final themes 1- 10

Theme 1. Choice

The extracted studies showed that women made decisions based on some form of compromise, as they re-prioritised aspirations for example, within their current circumstances. In addition, working mothers described placing limits on their own success, such as self-limiting business growth, particularly for the self-employed, and for many being held back by diminishing confidence in their abilities. The current review supports the view that choice, in these cases at least, is opaque and driven by individual circumstances, indeed, many studies identified an 'adapting' approach to decision-making rather than a wholly unconstrained or voluntary decision.

Within the extracted manuscripts, findings suggested that some women were exercising choices voluntarily, and others in reaction to their context or situation. Researchers labelled some participants as 'opportunity entrepreneurs' (Breen & Leung, 2020) or 'convenience' entrepreneurs, and others as proactive decision makers (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013). Women chose self-employment, purportedly to challenge the perceived boundaries of employment, which had proved difficult, although boundaries were later re-established by individuals themselves to re-delineate work and family (Breen & Leung, 2020, Lewis et al., 2015). The decision to pursue self-employment in two studies for example was framed as a response to or revolt against unsupportive organisational cultures or to negative experiences, including feeling marginalised or 'pushed out' (Breen & Leung, 2020; Foley et al., 2018). Studies also referred to individualised solutions (Grady & McCarthy, 2008) and ways in which clash of commitments between home and work were 'privatised' or internalised by women (Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009) indicating responsibility for decisions was on the individuals themselves.

Theme 2. Self/resources

The extracted studies demonstrated that the self or personal resources were influential on decisions, as was self-identity in terms of how they saw themselves, including demonstrating courage in decision making, risk-taking, tolerating ambiguity, and demonstrating self-efficacy in their decisions (Jackson & Scharman, 2002; Grady & McCarthy, 2008). In relation to self-efficacy,

women also showed uncertainty in their ability to adjust to the pace of work after children which influenced their decision to leave the workplace as well as low confidence levels (Lim & Rasdi, 2019; Rushing & Sparks, 2017). Women utilised a combination of weighing up cost and benefits, using personality, or strengths-based approaches to make decisions (Rushing & Sparks, 2017). The findings also showed a reciprocal relational process between work and family, in terms of the transfer of personal resources between the two (Breen & Leung, 2020).

Theme 3. Autonomy

The extracted studies included examples of women's desire to gain more control over their work, with a desire for freedom and autonomy and challenge influencing subsequent decisions. The theme of autonomy, control or seeking independence appeared across many studies. For example, in four studies which looked at decisions around self-employment, autonomy and flexibility were key influences (Breen & Leung, 2020; Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Foley et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2015). Control was also recognised as a driver for employees, acknowledged for its specific relevance to mid-career (Grady & McCarthy, 2008). Control also linked with the pursuit of flexibility for participants, in relation to their decision to continue in the workplace (Breen & Leung, 2020; Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011; Lim & Rasdi, 2019; Whittington, 2019). Flexibility was seen as important in both formal, as in flexible working/job sharing etc, and informal ways, such as in response to emergencies, which positively influenced participants in engaging with the workplace (Grady & McCarthy, 2008).

Theme 4. Relationism

Our findings demonstrated the collaborative nature of decision making, with partner support evidently important to the decision making. In addition, managers provided support with regards to accessing flexibility and supporting the intrinsic value of work. Results highlighted the impact of 'relationism' on women's decision-making, including recognising the impact of relationships with others on decisions (Lim & Rasdi, 2019) and outlining the benefits of taking a co-operative approach (Jackson & Scharman, 2002) including recommending early collaborative discussion to

decide who stays home (Rushing & Sparks, 2017). One study described the value of having a manager who understands and supports their situation (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011) and another of the benefit of a supportive partner to decision making (Jackson & Scharman, 2002; Whittington, 2019). One of the papers explicitly approached the data analysis through a relational lens, again highlighting the influence of relationships on career choice, including on women's choices to pursue self-employment (Breen & Leung, 2020). One of the studies, looking specifically at the decision for the fathers to stay home to be primary caregiver, exemplified the relational nature of decisions. These women involved expressed a continued desire to invest in their career, as in other studies, which was enabled by collaborating with a partner during decision making (Rushing & Sparks, 2017).

Theme 5. Family needs

Findings showed that participants considered the needs of the family in their decisions, which influenced their decisions. Women described reservations and feelings around childcare in part of their decision making, such as feelings of guilt in using formal or professional childcare (Lim & Rasdi, 2019; Stockey-Bridge, 2015). Others reported feeling more at peace in their work knowing the other parent was at home, reporting being career driven with a desire to also have a quality family life (Rushing & Sparks, 2017). Mothers also reported a desire to provide the same experience to each child, thereby being led by the decisions they had made previously; in terms of working patterns for example (Stockey-Bridge, 2015). Women also saw themselves as a role model for their own children, an influence in their continued engagement in the workforce (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). Some women explored their own early experience of being parented as a driver, for example having a mother who did not work influenced the participant's decision to do so (Rubin & Wooten, 2007).

Theme 6. Meaning

For many working mothers who have chosen to integrate work and family, the studies suggest that the challenge or intellectual stimulation of work was an important factor, with many studies

recognising the sense of meaning derived from being in work (Grady & McCarthy, 2008; Jackson & Scharman, 2002; Rushing & Parks, 2017; Stockey-Bridge, 2015; Whittington, 2019). Findings showed that working mothers value the intrinsic and social aspects of work, particularly those in full-time or in larger part-time jobs (Ruitenbergh, 2014). Participants recognised the positive contribution they made in their work, in one study women saw work as a place they are “at their best” (Whittington, 2019, p.86). Meaningfulness was a motivation for pursuing self-employment (Foley et al., 2018) and in the studies from those combining work and family, researchers also concluded that it was the combination of work and family which provided the sense of meaning (Grady & McCarthy, 2008; Jackson & Scharman, 2002).

Theme 7. Feelings

Feelings were an influence on women’s decisions. For example, mothers reported being influenced by their experience of ‘failing’ to deliver which initiated a process of questioning and subsequently doubting ability, which they ‘used to take for granted’ (Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009) leading them to lose confidence and ultimately leave the workplace. Guilt was something which was mentioned in a few studies, including feeling guilty for not being in the workplace (Rubin & Wooten, 2007) as well as not being at home (Whittington, 2019) highlighting the mothers’ attempts to fulfil certain expectations but apparently ‘failing’ to do so leaving participants with feelings of loss (Rubin & Wooten, 2007). This influence was important for deciding whether to continue to engage with a career which involved travel, as feelings such as guilt influenced decisions to reduce time being away from home, requiring adjustments to career ambition (Whittington, 2019).

Studies recognised the influence of negative aspects of motherhood, such as regarding it as boring, exhausting, or stressful and mothers are choosing to work to avoid such negative aspects of motherhood (Marks & Houston, 2002) with those working full time reporting finding work easier than motherhood (Ruitenbergh, 2014). Another study reported that mothers see work as a form of ‘escape’ (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013) and a benefit to their mental health (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). In addition to acknowledging the stresses of managing the different priorities of both mother

and worker mentioned in some studies, some participants were re-framing the stress in a more positive way, into something rewarding (Jackson & Scharman, 2002).

Theme 8. Ideals

The analysis of extracted studies found that women held certain ideals which had an influence over their decisions. Schemas of work and family devotion influenced women's decisions, due to perceived incompatibility of these two domains, leading to confusion or conflict over how or where to devote their time. For example, across many of the studies, participants reported the influence of being a 'good mother' on their decisions or being 'good enough'; living up to some expectation or belief they or others hold of mothers. Over half of the extracted studies explicitly discussing the concept of the ideal mother as an influence. Women also compared themselves unfavourably with others, reporting feeling inadequate with "pressure... from those below who aren't [mothers]" (Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009, p.333). One study indicated that the negative views of others, including from their families, influenced the mothers' choices and challenges around how much time to spend at work, which was not experienced by male peers who were also parents (Whittington, 2019).

Theme 9. Changes over time

The extracted studies evidenced changes over time for women with children, including a shift in priorities in the combination of work and motherhood. This included emergence of a new identity from the combination of roles, whereby managing both roles simultaneously brought stress and conflict as well as meaning and a sense of pride (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013, Lewis et al., 2015). Priorities changed over time, including a reduction in work devotion, with family devotion becoming an alternative source of meaning (Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009). Over time women created a balance between business growth and the needs of the family, seen as an important part of being an entrepreneur (Breen & Leung, 2020, p.262). Findings also highlighted the benefits of give and take from an employer which resulted in increased employee commitment (Grady & McCarthy, 2008).

Balance was seen as a temporary state, possible one day, problematic the next, showing its “elusive” nature (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011, p.341). Furthermore, short term changes contributed to longer term success (Whittington, 2019) and advanced planning on part of the individual supported later flexibility (Stockey-Bridge, 2015). How much participants engaged with work was influential, with those working more hours showing higher levels of work commitment than those working fewer hours, purportedly due to increased work involvement strengthening commitment to work, with absence making work commitment difficult to maintain (Marks & Houston, 2002). In addition, flexibility was seen as reciprocal, in that being provided with some flexibility in the workplace by an employer led to greater flexibility being offered by an employee along with greater commitment (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013). Finally, in terms of the impact of shifts and changes on decision making, findings illustrated that decisions were made at various stages, for some very early on, even before children were born, and for others later reflecting the individualised and shifting nature of the decision-making factors (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011).

Theme 10. Sacrifices

The studies explored ways in which women with children are experiencing sacrifices within and through their career decisions. The extracted studies recognised sacrifices experienced by women during their career due to having children, such as missing out on promotions (Foley et al., 2018; Jackson & Scharman, 2002; Stockey-Bridge, 2015) placing limitations on their businesses or their own ambitions, for example while children were young (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Whittington, 2019). As already demonstrated, studies highlighted that some women with children described an increased desire for participating in ‘satisfying’ paid work and creating meaning in their work, however the research findings suggest this reveals a paradox in that this occurs at the very time when it is not achievable (Stockey-Bridge, 2015).

The sacrifices or trade-offs were also seen in more positive light within the research where for example, some women described such sacrifices as peaceful not sacrificial for example “I’ve lost the prestige [...] power [...] I think everything I’ve lost has been worth it” (Jackson & Scharman, 2002, p.184). Others shared feeling they could be better mothers because they worked (Grant-

Vallone & Ensher, 2011). In addition, for some participants the adaptations and sacrifices made in the short term, for example reducing travel or work opportunities, may result in success in the longer term, although not for everyone as it preceded leaving the workplace for some (Whittington, 2019). The research also found that participants exiting high-commitment careers reported reducing ambitions immediately prior, with a period of transition after, involving loss of identity and isolation reinforcing their decision to leave (Rubin & Wooten, 2007).

4.3.4.2. Analysis of themes by career decision

The current research question is 'What is known in the literature about the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers, post maternity through schooling?'. Therefore, in addition to the influences (themes) identified by the narrative synthesis the career decisions within each study were also analysed. The career decisions were considered to fall into four broad categories. First, the decision to choose self-employment/entrepreneurship which related to four studies (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013; Lewis et al., 2015; Foley et al., 2018; Breen & Leung, 2020). Secondly, the decision to blend family and work (also referred to as 'opting in between') appeared in six of the 15 extracted studies. Next, the decision to 'opt out' or leave the workplace was seen in three papers (Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Halrynjo & Lyng, 2009; Lim & Rasdi, 2019). Finally, 'other' decisions, contained one study referring to the decision for the father to stay at home (Rushing & Sparks, 2017) and one which considered a mixture of both opting out and opting in between (Whittington, 2019). It was considered by the authors that looking at the number of times themes occurred across papers specifically in relation to these career decisions may provide some additional useful information about the factors influencing career decisions. Caution should be taken in interpretation of these themes across studies, in part due to the varying number of studies across each category. Table 7 presents the themes across all papers, as well as the career decisions to which the studies refer, which shows the relevance and importance of the theme in relation to the varying career decisions represented.

Table 7.*Analytical themes according to extracted studies including career decision(s)*

Study	Analytical themes									Career decision(s)	
	Choice	Self/ Resources	Autonomy	Relationis m	Family needs	Meaning	Feelings	Ideals	Changes over time		Sacrifices
Jackson and Scharman (2002)		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	Opting 'in between'
Marks and Houston (2002)					✓		✓		✓		Opting 'in between'
Rubin and Wooten (2007)					✓		✓				Opting out
Grady and McCarthy (2008)	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		Opting 'in between'
Halrynjo and Lyng (2009)	✓						✓		✓	✓	Opting out
Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011)		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		Opting 'in between'
Duberley and Carrigan (2013)	✓		✓					✓	✓	✓	Self-employment
Ruitenber (2014)		✓		✓							Opting 'in between'
Lewis et al. (2015)			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		Self-employment
Stockey-Bridge (2015)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Opting 'in between'
Rushing and Sparks (2017)		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		Stay at home father
Foley et al. (2018)	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	Self-employment
Lim and Rasdi (2019)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				Opting out
Whittington (2019)			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	Opting out/ opting in between
Breen and Leung (2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		Self-employment

From this analysis of themes by career decision, three of the themes occurring most frequently across all papers included changes over time, autonomy, and feelings, which suggests in this review these were common to the most studies. The theme of changes over time occurred across all three types of career decisions. Autonomy as an influence was seen more with the studies where women chose self-employment and opting in between. Feelings was observed most in the studies which related to the choice of women to opt out. The influence of self/resources also occurred relatively frequently, primarily in the studies where the career-related decisions involved opting in between, suggesting that women were concerned with the self/resources when

considering the blend of home and work in employment compared with those leaving or choosing self-employment.

4.4. Discussion

This review was responding to the research question: 'What is known in the literature about the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of professional working mothers, post-maternity throughout schooling?'. Using a thematic narrative approach, 15 studies were synthesised which reported on the experiences of a total of 466 working mothers navigating varied careers alongside motherhood. The results indicate some noteworthy factors with regards to the factors influencing career decisions of working mothers. Whilst many of the mothers in the selected studies demonstrated a strong desire to work, even for those who ultimately chose to leave the workplace, many reported experiencing barriers to making this a reality. The findings also revealed some facilitating factors, which positively influenced decisions. In addition, findings demonstrated a variation in the availability of options and opportunities, particularly when children are younger. While participants showed different motivations and perspectives, it was possible to draw some conclusions from the findings which are explored in detail now.

The findings pointed to an individualisation of decisions for women with children who made use of their own perceived resources, including taking risks or re-crafting their roles to meet their needs. This included assessing their values, beliefs, and purposes in relation to career decisions, combining perceptions of self, alongside family demands. Women also described experiencing loss in confidence which influenced their subsequent decision making. Confidence in using one's resources, or self-efficacy, is important to the contemporary career (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) and has been linked to career success (Abele & Spurk, 2009). Many participants in the studies were making use of their own resources, and experienced loss of confidence due to motherhood, so it would be valuable to develop further understanding of the relationship between self-efficacy and career success in relation to being a mother.

The review highlighted the influence of autonomy and control over women's career decisions, particularly in relation to decisions around self-employment. The analysis showed ways in which women with children were seeking to gain more control over their work, including more independence, freedom, and challenge. This suggests that encouraging and supporting challenging work for women with children could result in continued and sustained motivation whereas reducing challenge may be demotivating for some women. The current findings proposed that the presence of challenge in work could provide meaning and a sense of accomplishment, in work and to their role as mothers. This provides an alternative view to the conclusions of some previous research, including the KCM model, which proposed balance over challenge for women with children, particularly at earlier stages of their career (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). Gaining meaning from work or having meaningful work is important, according to Chalofsky (2003) it provides an inclusive state of being between work and authentic selves, as opposed to a dissociation of the work-self. This could help to explain the reasons women may value meaningful work after children; to hold on to a sense of self and to connect with their work-self (Gómez-Salgado et al., 2019), as seen in the results. Furthermore, meaning gained through working supports the role of mother as well as worker (Lewis et al., 2015). It would be beneficial to explore the value of meaningful work through additional up to date qualitative research exploring the impact on career decisions.

Relationism influenced decision making and early and collaborative decisions with involvement of others were found to be beneficial. The current study found evidence for the influence of relationships on decision making, including with partners and managers. Prior research found that supervisor support is an important factor in keeping women with children in work, as identified by research around organisational loyalty which indicated that women who are given the opportunity to openly discuss work-family issues with supervisors may feel more valued and appreciated (Leschyshyn & Minnotte, 2014).

Women were also influenced by fulfilling certain ideals, for example the 'good mother' narrative was pervasive in the current review, based on the assumption that mothers should be directing

their unlimited time and energy towards their children, thereby giving less to other commitments such as work (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). This suggests more research is required to challenge and redefine the work and home spheres in which these narratives operate to build on that already carried out (Aranda & Glick, 2014; Blair-Loy, 2003) as well as considering different perspectives on the topic including the experience of others who may be influential, including fathers (Damaske et al., 2014).

The literature from the systematic review suggests that mothers may engage in work to support their mental health, supporting other research into the impact of work on mental wellbeing which proposes that working even part-time may provide important benefits to working mothers later in life (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). Previous research has found that both work interruptions and stay-at-home mothering may be significantly linked with worse mental and physical health (Frech & Damaske, 2014) and with lasting positive impacts later in life (Caputo et al., 2020). Therefore, while part-time work may have negative implications with regards promotion prospects, job security, and lower status for working mothers, part-time work involvement may have a beneficial, even protective effect. Research has shown mixed effects of part time work on wellbeing (Cho, 2016) and therefore the positive effects may be due to the mediating effects of other factors such as leadership and job security (Burr et al., 2015), or social support, with management support found to be particularly supportive for women (Mellor et al., 2020). One explanation put forward is that flexible working may help to reduce the mental load associated with worrying about the interface of home and work (Dean et al., 2021).

Another protective effect relevant to this population may be the reported benefits identified of re-framing perceptions around combining work and motherhood, from a negative stressful experience into a more positive meaningful and more rewarding one (Dickson, 2018). Work may be perceived as offering a welcome break from the challenges of motherhood for some, including relief from boredom (Gan, 2008; Islam, 2020).

4.5. Study strengths and limitations

This study adds to the literature by providing synthesised and summarised research evidence in response to focused research question, going beyond any one of the individual studies (Cumming 2014; Siddaway et al., 2019; Stevens, 2001) and a valuable addition to the field of occupational psychology (Daniels, 2019). Whilst the study, to the best of the authors knowledge is the first to systematically review the evidence on psychological factors impacting working mothers, it does have some limitations. The research data, despite being combined, still represents a small cross section of working women and therefore should not be taken as a representation of all working mothers. This is due to the small number of studies included, in addition to those included being primarily based on qualitative research including some with smaller participant numbers. However, this additionally demonstrates that this area is under researched and despite the importance of psychological aspects of the penalty of motherhood, the larger proportion of academic literature is focused on salary and objective measures. In addition, whilst the views of a cross-section of working mothers are present, the nature of the question which focused on decision and choice may have excluded some viewpoints which could be relevant, including women for whom no choice was perceived or exercised, and their employment status remained static despite the transition to motherhood. Additionally, some studies mentioned that they would benefit from incorporating the views of fathers and whilst this was not the focus of the current PhD, the viewpoints of fathers would inevitably add additional value to future research into the career decisions of working mother, particularly given their role with respect to relational theme identified through this research.

Systematic reviews are less commonly used in organisational psychology (Briner & Denyer, 2012) even though there are significant benefits in terms of suitability (Daniels, 2019) as well as the comprehensive nature of the approach (Siddaway et al., 2019) and potential impact (Cumming 2014). It is hoped that this study therefore provides a valuable addition to the literature and an encouragement to other occupational psychology practitioners to engage more with this approach.

4.6. Next steps in the research

This study took a systematic approach to reviewing the relevant research across two decades on the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers. The findings indicated that many women are motivated by a continued investment in career growth and development, however certain barriers exist which create challenges for them in exercising their career decisions, as well as facilitating factors supporting their continued career progression following children. While this reflects the changing landscape of contemporary careers in general, it may have a specific resonance for this group.

The compromises identified indicates that more can be done to support working mothers to continue to meet their career objectives while also looking after their families' needs, for example taking a more personalised or flexible approach to reviewing progress to take account of the changing circumstances or needs. Indeed, by providing tailored support to the diverse needs of workers, such as working mothers, they may more successfully achieve their career aspirations, which may have been impacted due to insufficient support mechanisms being available in the first place. This highlights the importance of developing a deeper understanding of these factors over the course of the careers of working mothers, from their own perspective.

Women in the studies were also relational in their decisions, and the support of others was seen to be important in both a positive and negative way, impacting on their decisions and experiences, however the ways in which this occurred were not clear. It was also evident from the data that women in the studies were largely responsible for decisions around childcare which impacted significantly on subsequent career decisions, although how this shifts or changes over time is not explored. This is something which will be explored in the next study, with the qualitative narrative interviews not limited to one point in time but explore the impact of motherhood on career decisions over their career.

The research findings highlighted the changing nature of career decisions, with participants reporting that their experiences changed over time, and reinforcing the importance of using their own resources to navigate, the value of maintaining employability and of a flexible and adaptable

organisational context. These factors highlight the value of understanding the perspectives of working mothers, including how they navigate their various career decisions over time, rather than focusing on one transition such as maternity leave.

This review has answered the research question to understand what is known in the literature about the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of professional working mothers after maternity leave, identifying a range of factors of relevance to this group. It has also uncovered other questions which may be helpfully answered through the subjective experiences of working mothers, and this is where the research will turn next.

Chapter 5: Qualitative narrative interviews to explore how motherhood influences career decisions

5.1. Introduction

As outlined previously, women experience a penalty of motherhood, not experienced by men with children, which results in negative consequences for their careers (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia, 2020; Khan et al., 2014; Staff & Mortimer, 2012). This results in potentially negative impacts such as lower career continuation, status, perceptions of others such as colleagues or supervisors (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008; Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017; O'Hagan, 2018; Sanzari et al., 2021). Also highlighted (e.g., 1.5.1.) much of the research has placed focused on the financial impact of the motherhood penalty (Anderson, 2018; Budig et al., 2012; Kahn et al., 2014; Luhr, 2020; Fuller et al., 2018) and a gap exists in the understanding of the factors influencing career decision-making which also impacts on career penalties for working mothers (Grether & Wiese, 2016; Noon & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020) which this thesis aims to address. In addition, an exploration of the factors using women's own understanding of these issues is wanting (McIntosh et al., 2012).

The systematic review in chapter 4 identified certain factors influencing careers of women with children which include compromises in their decision making, and the impact of shifts and changes occurring over the course of their careers. The results of that review also emphasised the value of flexibility and personalisation which can respond to changes circumstances or needs and the value of deepening our understanding of the factors impacting career decisions of working mothers, from their own perspective. Thus, adding a qualitative perspective to the previous systematic review, following a mixed methods approach enables a comprehensive account of the area of enquiry, in this case to identify the psychological factors impacting on the career decisions of working mothers through a combination of existing empirical evidence and women's reported experiences (Bryman, 2006). A narrative approach also includes the participant's subjective views enabling in-depth accounts of people's experiences (Evans, 2018) based on their own interpretation (Mattingly &

Lawler, 2000) with the participants at the centre of the research (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Thus, this second study will be building on the systematic review through the addition of lived experiences through the lens of career decisions of a sample of UK working mothers. The research question is 'How does motherhood influence the careers of working mothers, from their own perspective?'

5.2. Study methodology

5.2.1. Research design

As described in the methodology (chapter 3), this study uses a narrative interview approach to encourage interviewees to tell stories from their own perspective (Cassell, 2015). It follows the three-stage approach (Feher, 2011), with the inclusion of the initiation phase of Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2007, as follows:

1. Initiation: start recording and present the initial topic.
2. Narrative phase: Ask generative narrative question, interviewee then free to respond without interruption.
3. Narrative follow-up: Additional (what) questions are asked to gather more information if necessary.
4. Conclusion: Stop recording, answer (why) questions, if any.

5.2.2. Study participants

The participants for the narrative interviews were recruited via social media. This involved advertising the research using social media, emailing personal and professional contacts with links to the post to explain the research, and asking participants to get in touch if they would be interested in participating. The only prerequisite for participation in the semi-structured interviews was that participants needed to be a working mother currently in some form of paid employment of a professional nature. In choosing the sample size, sufficiency of numbers may be decided using different methods. These include data saturation whereby 'the sample size is sufficient when additional interviews or focus groups do not result in identification of new concepts' (Sergeant, 2012, p.1). However, there is little agreement in the literature as to how to achieve true saturation

and estimates vary (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Other researchers have suggested an approach including calculating power or probability of an observation and on sample size or number required to be confident of the observation (Fugard & Potts, 2015). However, this has not been universally accepted as an approach for thematic analysis (TA), accused of being at odds with the exploratory nature of TA and of regarding themes as existing entities ready to be discovered rather than more actively created by the interaction of the researcher with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Braun and Clarke instead concur with others proposing that sample size “cannot be predicted by formulae or perceived redundancy” (Malterud et al., 2015, p.2). A review of approaches taken indicates that the typical sample size is likely to be a function of several, relatively pragmatic, factors including but not limited to researcher’s experience (Ryan & Bernard, 2006), confidence (Mason 2010), limitations of the sampling technique (Browne & Russell, 2003) or doing what was stated in a research proposal (Mason, 2010). When planning the current research, a consideration of the pragmatic factors of managing time, data analysis and balancing the detailed analysis to gain access to the complexity and subtlety in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2016), alongside a breadth of experience of several voices, a total 20 interviews were planned, which was achieved.

5.2.3. Participant details

The 20 participants were all living and working in England at the time of interview. Seventeen participants were UK nationals, three from the United States, where they started their careers. Participants ranged in age from 33 to 54. Seven worked in the public sector, 12 in the private sector, one in the third sector and one combining private and third sector. Eighteen participants were married, one cohabiting and one divorced. Each participant had at least one child at the time of interview, with children’s ages range from youngest child being under one to eldest 22, although this participant also had a child under 18, as per criteria for participation. In addition, participants are reflecting on experiences which occurred when they, and therefore their children, were younger. Participants described their current working arrangements with 10 (50%) working part-time such as working within school hours, two days per week, 24 or 30 hours. Of those, three reported working during term time only. Six participants reported working full-time hours including

one working a compressed week (full time hours over 9 days per fortnight). Finally, four women reported their working hours as ‘full time plus i.e., including additional hours. One example of which being four 12-hour days plus one 9-hour day, making a total of 57 hours. See Table 8 for full biographical information.

Table 8.

Biographical data for all participants (N=20)

Participant	Age	Marital Status	Organisation	Nature of employment	Current working arrangements	Number of children	Children's age(s)
1	47	Married	Private Sector	Consultancy	Part time	2	11, >18
2	44	Married	Private Sector	Coaching	Part time	4	3, 8, 8, 10
3	37	Married	Public Sector	Advanced Teaching Assistant	Part time	1	8
4	53	Married	Private Sector	Executive and team coach	Part time	1	13
5	38	Married	Public Sector	Supply chain Management	Part time	2	6, 7
6	43	Married	Public Sector	Academic	Full time	2	8, 10
7	37	Married	Private Sector	company owner	Full time	1	1
8	39	Married	Private Sector/Third Sector	Consultant	Part time	2	1, 5
9	40	Married	Private Sector	Head of People	Full time	1	<1
10	35	Married	Private Sector	Consultant	Part time	2	4, 7
11	50	Married	Private Sector	Head of Service	Full time ‘plus’	3	11, 13, >18
12	45	Co-habiting	Public Sector	Head of People	Full time ‘plus’	2	7, 10
13	44	Married	Public Sector	Senior HR Manager	Full time	2	12, 9
14	41	Divorced	Public Sector	Deputy Director	Full time ‘plus’	3	11, 12, 15
15	36	Married	Private sector	Business psychologist and coach	Part time	1	6
16	54	Married	Private sector	CEO	Part time	3	11, 17, 18
17	35	Married	Private sector	Business Development Manager	Full time ‘plus’	2	2, 4
18	38	Married	Public sector	Occupational therapist	Full time	1	2
19	33	Married	Third sector	Programme Manager	Full time	3	1, 4, 12
20	36	Married	Private sector	Business consultancy/ trainer	Part time	2	8, 9

5.2.4. Procedure

Participants for this study were recruited via social media (LinkedIn®) requesting participation from working women with children, employed or self-employed and affiliated with or working for any type of organisation in the United Kingdom (Appendix C). Emails were also sent to professional contacts of the primary researcher who were additionally asked to share the request with their network. This was to reach a range of responses, including a wider representation.

Interviews took place online, using Zoom, following University ethical approval. Zoom is recognised as a suitable platform for collecting qualitative data due to ease of use, relative cost effectiveness and security options (Archibald et al., 2019). Participants who agreed to take part received information on the research in the form of an email invitation (Appendix D), followed by participant information sheet (Appendix E), a shorter pre-interview briefing also in writing (Appendix F), as well as a verbal outline of the process of the narrative interview at the time of interview, with an opportunity to ask questions before consenting to take part, with the option to withdraw at any stage (Appendix G). As above, all participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E and G) which they were requested to sign prior to or immediately before the initial briefing for the narrative interview.

Through these documents participants were informed about the general nature of the study. The provision of broad information is considered an ethical way to conduct research (Collis & Hussey, 2013). Participants were advised that the title of this study was 'exploring the career decisions and choices for working mother' with the aim 'to understand the experiences of working mothers in how they make decisions regarding their career and the factors which have influenced those career decisions'. Participants were not given any specifics on the research aim and research questions to reduce the likelihood of participants providing socially acceptable responses (Correll et al, 2007). Participants were also informed of the voluntary nature of their participation in the research through a Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent document (Collis & Hussey, 2013). This also outlined the process by which participants may, if they should so wish, withdraw from the research at any point. This information also informed participants of the protection of anonymity of

their data throughout, which was communicated to ensure that they would not be identified, which it is hoped would encourage openness of responses (Collis & Hussey, 2013). Upon completion, participants were provided with debrief sheet (Appendix H), which outlined the nature of the study once again, including some resources for additional advice or guidance following the interview which included a list of organisations which participants may find useful including the charity Working Families and UK Government support. This debrief also included contact detail, how to receive results for those interested, and finally a reminder of the process for withdrawal.

5.2.5. Interviews

The interviews began with a generative narrative question (see chapter 3 for details of narrative interview approach) as follows:

“I want you to tell me the story of your career to date. I’d like you to think back as far as you can remember, and include information about any specific career aspirations, education, and training. As you do this, I would also like you to include information about how you believe being a mother has influenced your career along the way. This may relate to the time before you had children. Please take your time doing this. I will not interrupt you, but I will make some notes for follow up questions afterwards.” This question signalled the start of the participant’s narrative storytelling, before which they received explanation of the process of the narrative interview and offered an opportunity to ask questions before commencing. The interviews lasted for between 31-64 minutes (median = 44.5 minutes), where participants described their career experiences as they related to motherhood, which for some started before they had children.

5.2.6. Data analysis

Interviews were recorded online using zoom and using a secure recording device for back up. Transcriptions were completed by the researcher, using secure transcription software (Express Scribe Transcription software), and all files were deleted once final transcripts were completed and saved on a secure drive. Finally, transcripts were uploaded to NVIVO for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method of analysing the interviews allows researchers to identify, analyse,

and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative data, in line with the purpose of the current research. Using Braun and Clarke's guidelines for reflexive thematic analysis the approach followed six steps, in order, although some may be revisited, as this approach is not linear (Byrne, 2021). Stage 1 involved familiarisation of the data, gained through manual transcription of the audio, and reading through before starting any further analysis. In stage 2, the initial codes were developed by working systematically through the data, identifying interesting and informative items on NVIVO. Codes were initially developed and subsequently redefined, including through discussion with a second researcher (in this case the PhD supervisor). Here the data was thoroughly reviewed, and initial codes identified (see Appendix I for extracts from 'early' coding). Examples of the early codes (or nodes according to NVIVO) include moving from quote "my boss, my line manager for the last few years, is, has children and really understands and is really em supportive of different working patterns" (participant number 14) to "employer supportive of working patterns" (code). Next, stage 3 involved generating themes, whereby the focus was on aggregated meaning of codes, rather than on the individual items. This involved review of all codes and combining to share meaning and thus form themes. This process is typically recognised as an active engagement by the primary researcher with the data to interpret the importance of the themes, and communicate the meaning, in response to the research question (Byrne, 2021). In stage 4, the themes were reviewed and revised using questions on the validity of each theme, in terms of meaning, quality and overall coherence (Braun & Clarke, 2012) in other words how directly related they are to the research question, which is in the forefront of the researcher's mind at all stages of the process. At this stage, quotes which were coded and considered not valid, or lacking coherence with the research question were not included further in the analysis. One example being "with me being 53 now, ... maybe it is not a bad time to actually take my foot off, to really have a chance to think about what I want to do" (4), coded at stage 2 as 'age and career', at stage 3 with other related nodes into the theme 'diversity related', not sufficiently related to the overall theme for this study, and therefore not included in final analysis. On the other hand, stage 4 examples include further coding of the aforementioned "employer supportive of working patterns" considered valid and related to research question, and at this stage coded with other examples of

managerial support (more detail of this sub-theme in 5.3.1.3.). The fifth stage involved defining and naming the themes, again paying attention to the narrative which answers the research question, with this example named as “manager support”. Appendix J shows an example of the output from NVIVO from this stage. Lastly, the sixth and final stage involving writing up the findings (here represented by section 5.3).

5.2.7. Validity and reliability

Within quantitative research, establishing the validity and reliability of results is an important step in the demonstration of research rigour (Heale & Twycross, 2015) a more complex topic for qualitative research. In the latter, the primary researcher is ‘unavoidably implicated’ in conducting the narrative interviews and data analysis, due to the proximity to the content as a researcher, a mother and a working woman, and so regular opportunities were taken to reflect on and discuss the implications of involvement with the study (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). A record of decisions and notes made during analysis were kept as a form of audit trail (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In addition, a transcript of the interview was sent to the first participant for review before any further interviews were completed, to check accuracy of preliminary data, a form of member checking as well as to an additional participant, on request, mid-way through (Carlson, 2010). Finally, the themes from data analysis were discussed and shared with a colleague for peer analysis checking at various stages of the thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017).

As reported in Table 8 (5.2.3.), a variety of professional roles were represented, ranging from occupational therapist to CEO, some with similarity to the professional activities of the primary researcher, a practicing occupational psychologist and coach. Therefore, their participation could be in part due to the nature of the researchers’ connections, in the field of occupational psychology, coaching and training, and in addition this could create some familiarity for the researcher of the career paths or career decisions of the participants. Four of the interviewees could be considered professional contacts of the researcher having worked previously for the

same organisation, the rest were not directly known prior to the interviews. All possible attempts were made to reduce the potential for bias with these connections as outlined above.

5.3. Results

5.3.1. Thematic Analysis

The themes from the 20 participants' responses are organised into five categories related to factors influencing career decisions, summarised in figure 5. The final five themes identified were: 1) Changing identities/changing roles, 2) Using own resources, 3) Support, 4) Accessing flexible work and 5) Career progress. The themes reflect ways in which motherhood has impacted on the career decisions of participants, each including several subthemes, as shown in Table 2, and expanded in the follow section. Figure 5 shows a visual representation of the themes.

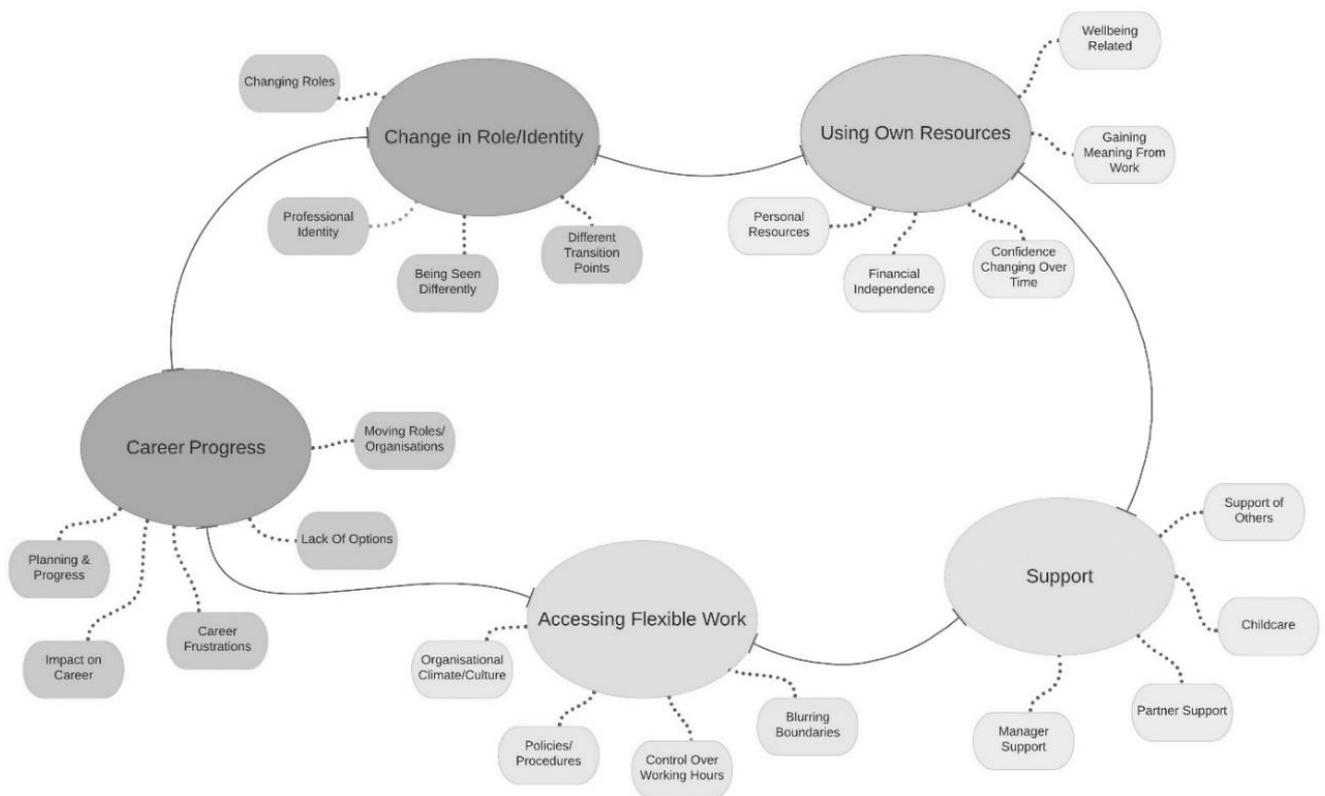


Figure 5.

Results from thematic analysis of factors influencing career decisions of working mothers: all five themes, including sub themes.

5.3.1.1. Theme 1: Change in Role/Identity

This theme explored women's perceptions of ways in which their role and identity shifted and changed because of being a mother. Participants reported influences from the change in roles due to being a mother and a worker, and the impact on professional identity, as well as how the perceptions of others shift and change, from being seen differently to adapting to how others see them, and the impact of that. This theme also recognised the changing nature of transitions and the different ways in which changes occur; from early impacts of family planning for some, through pregnancy, maternity leave, and the changing needs of growing children. Each of the four sub themes identified are now expanded as follows:

1a. Changing roles. Women discussed differences in roles after having children. This included attempts to fulfil the roles of mother and worker, and a form of conflict in managing this. One woman described amending her "aspirations accordingly" because "we can't do it all" (participant 1). Women experienced pressure managing different roles, for example "being a super mum and a super [manager]" (12), "want[ing] to do more at home" (14). Women found it challenging to move between the different roles of motherhood and career. This 'work self' was something women worked to keep hold of, after having children, although it brought with it some difficult decisions around how to manage their workload. Women described the difficulties in seeing themselves as a worker and a mother.

1b. Professional identity. Women discussed the importance of professional identity to their career, for example seeing work as "a huge part of my life and defines who I am" (14). This included how their identity was "tied up with what I do and how useful I feel" (4). This was both a positive influence in terms of the determination to remain in work, but also less positive in terms of causing stress and questioning career choices. Some described the benefits of their professional identity and the value they placed on it, which drove them on to continue. Many worked hard over time to invest in their career which drove them to continue engaging. For example, one woman reflected on how hard she worked to build up a positive and reliable professional reputation.

1c. Being seen differently. Women described how the negative perceptions of others influenced their decisions in terms of being seen differently as a mother and a worker (for more positive perceptions of others, see theme 3. Support). One woman was told by a colleague that she would no longer be able to give the same commitment to work as she had before children. For this woman, this increased her determination that motherhood would not impact the way she worked. Another participant, prior to becoming pregnant, was told by her boss that “he didn’t think women, once they’d had a baby, could go back full time, and work as they’d done before” (9). This impacted on her own preparation for having a baby, as she felt no longer wanted or valued. At the time of the interview this participant was in the process of preparing not to return to that workplace following her maternity leave, due in part to such discussions with her boss. Another participant remembered how a manager, early on in her career, told her; “don’t bother working so hard, you’ll have children one day and it’s not worth it” (15) which was something which influenced her many years later.

1d. Different transition points. This sub-theme related to different points when changes occurred which were split into three sub-themes; pregnancy (including family planning)/maternity leave, returning to work (following maternity leave) and changing family needs over time, all of which related to important transitions described by participants. Experiences did vary, however participants recollected challenges with some focus on timing or announcing pregnancy, on managing maternity leave and the return to work, however as children grew older challenges did not disappear, but rather changed, with issues including working hours and travel being highlighted.

1d.1. Pregnancy and maternity leave: Women were conscious of the right time to have children, with factors including age, length of time in their role or organisation. One woman described holding off until the right time where she “could do it in a way that I would be happy” (7), for her primarily focused on financial security. Even when the time was right, conception was not always easy, at times requiring some modifications including some reprioritisation or stepping back from work. In terms of pregnancy itself, more than one woman felt marginalised and let down by their

organisation during this time. One woman described how her boss forgot her maternity leave was starting imminently, leaving her feeling undervalued and led her to leave. Another felt “pushed out of the business ... mainly for having a baby” (6), she left, losing her confidence in being an employee, opting instead for self-employment. Participants also described how maternity leave experiences also influenced decisions around how, or even whether, to return to work. One woman described being moved to another team whilst on maternity leave with no consultation, as she explained “[Senior management] have just gone, she will be grateful to have a job when she gets back, and we will just put her in this team because we can” (10). She felt she had no choice, was lacking in confidence to challenge this decision and after trying to make it work, eventually decided to leave her job. For many their commitment was unchanged during pregnancy and maternity “I worked right up until I dropped with those kids” (11) and some were comforted by the knowledge of the legal protection afforded to them during pregnancy “you’re not allowed to discriminate against someone who is pregnant” (16) although many described challenges and changes which occurred whilst away, which impacted on their return to work, covered next.

1d.2. Returning to work (following maternity leave): This was a challenging and emotional time for some. One participant recalled “thinking I really don’t want to be here and tears rolling down my face ... I just want to be at home with [my baby]” (14). Another woman described feeling undervalued on her first day back after maternity leave, “I couldn’t get in the building, due to the change in hours, and that was my welcome back after maternity leave” (13). These experiences strongly influenced the women’s re-adjustment to the workplace, their working patterns, and highlighted the importance of support in this time (see more on support in theme 3). Just one woman discussed the use of shared parental leave to support their own maternity leave. Financial resources also influenced the decision to return to work (see also theme 2b on financial independence).

1d.3. Changing needs of growing children: Participants reflected on the changing needs of their family over time which influenced their career decisions. This included their children’s ages, indicating that “it’s those early years I think that are really difficult to manage” (8). These early

years clearly had a significant impact “I honestly felt there was a lot, there was a period of time where I was just firefighting” (8). One woman saw opportunities increase as her children grew: “I think as the children got a little bit older, I started put myself forwards for different [...] opportunities” (14). However, not for everyone, as this woman who described the notion of having more time after the kids start school as “a complete misnomer” (6) due to the lack of time between drop off and picking up from school. Also notable is the number of children on women’s decisions, with more than one child being “a job in itself” (6), one woman felt she could cope with the “strains and stresses of ... having a big job and being a mum” (8) with one child but not with two.

5.3.1.2. Theme 2: Using Own Resources

This theme described ways in which women were drawing on their own resources to manage their careers and family, including prioritising their or their families’ needs. Their personal resources were an important factor for them, including using the internal (or self-) resources available to them to manage, as well as reflecting on practical resources such as financial needs and the importance of financial independence on their career decisions, also influenced by motherhood. Women described changes in levels of confidence over time, which impacted how they used their resources and navigated decisions. Perceived levels of confidence in using the self-resources were influential here. Women described the importance of meaning making from work and connecting with their purpose, to maintain their commitment to careers. Finally, women described the issues which impacted on their wellbeing and ability to manage and cope with the challenges experienced with work and home which impacted on their decision making.

2a. Personal resources. Women spoke of their successes and a sense of pride and validation in career-related decisions, which were important to them. This included pride in achievements, such as career related successes, and pointed to the importance for some women of the realisation of career goals or of the value of hard work during the earlier years which they saw as paying off later, as children had grown. Participants also discussed the resources which they drew on to get through the more difficult periods, for example when children were younger, so that they may remain in the workplace. This included a “drive and determination” (14) and need to be resilient

“the capacity, the wherewithal, the tenacity, the just the ability to keep going, despite the challenges” (1). While such traits may exist prior to becoming a mother, they became important features of their continued engagement with their career: “I still had a lot of fire in my belly you know in terms of like, making a go of my career” (17). Women found it helpful to connect with their original work motivations and interests in their career to keep going, such as through “sheer stubbornness that ... I worked so hard for this career” (6). And also, the importance of the career they trained for “it was you know; it was really, it was work that you felt like was important em, that was worth your education, it was worth getting your degree for because everything you learned you now are trying to apply” (16).

Women described how they started to see the importance of meeting their own needs, albeit after some time, they started to recognise the importance of their own wellbeing as “much more important” (8) than work, and “I don’t do stress, I’ve got enough stress [with children]” (19). This re-prioritisation appeared to develop over time, for example when children were in school, as the women sought to prioritise their own needs. This was often preceded by a time where they “just couldn’t manage the work and the home demands” (4) resulting in this re-prioritisation.

2b. Financial independence. Women’s financial considerations were an important driver, and having financial independence influenced many career choices. Women talked of getting to a comfortable place financially, or to a certain level in their career before having children. For some this was for financial reasons, as women felt they needed to be financially secure as they perceived they would lose out after children due to their reduced hours or lack of opportunities for progress once they have children (see theme on career progress for more on this). Some participants spoke of an increased dependence including financially, on others following children, and an internal conflict, compared to their previous independence. Financial resources also influenced women’s decisions over maternity leave or returning to work, “from financial reasons I knew I needed to come back” (13), and on the working pattern “if finances didn’t come into it... if I could have managed a four-day week or something like that, that would have been better” (12).

2c. Confidence changing over time. Women described how their levels of confidence fluctuated over time, with some describing the lack of confidence in their work selves after becoming a mother: "I absolutely lacked confidence in my ability" (13). For one mother, the lack of structure or direction of motherhood "absolutely smashed my confidence" which then impacted on her career as she felt she "didn't have the same fight" (15). Lack of confidence was also related to the time of returning to work, and when children were younger. See more on this in sub-themes 5d (moving organisations) and 1d (transitions). Women also described the importance of developing confidence in asking for what they need, particularly with regards to the need to now balance their children's needs, for example one described how she changed a meeting location to suit her, as "[being a mother] gave me a sort of assertiveness that [the meeting] needs to be near me. (15). This showed the changes in confidence at different stages.

2d. Gaining meaning from work. Women spoke of the importance of gaining meaning from work, which related to their decisions as it was important for many women to make a difference in their work, or to connect with their purpose. Although this was also challenging as one woman put it "I feel like I am at my best when I'm contributing to different areas ... I find that rewarding, although ... a bit like keeping so many plates spinning but the rewards for me intrinsically are so much ... I want to continue" (14). "I didn't want to [just do enough to get by] because I wanted to make a difference" (15). This appeared to be important to these women in terms of how they spent their time and making a difference through their work was a theme for many.

2e. Wellbeing related: In the interviews participants spoke of the stresses of having children and working and how they felt this influenced their decisions in terms of their focus on work, their priorities and even moving roles. Many worried about how they would cope, and the word guilt was described in eight interviews, mostly for the family sacrifices "my son had an awful day at school, [and] the guilt was there as I wasn't there to pick him up" (13), but also for the work side "I still feel the guilt of ... I'm not working full time" (15) "my guilt about managing the job" (12). The stress experienced by the women was particularly when children were younger, and included questioning why they were putting themselves through this, and managing so much. Some had really

challenging experiences and described many times of nearly giving up; it was “really hard”, “really tough” (2), “really unhappy” and “pushed to the edge” (18) with the impact of it all, and feeling “nearly burnt out” (5), “it got to be too much” (3 & 4). This was a scenario which a few women described which included feeling under extreme pressure from “keeping the balls in the [air] and to juggle [it all]” (1). For one, the stress from this period required being signed off work. For some, following these stressful years, the priorities shifted and impacted decisions; “I don’t do stress, I’ve got enough stress, like a very cheeky boy, [and] this baby that always doesn’t sleep ... I need a job that can be relaxed a little bit, you know, or I can be at my best” (19). And prioritising themselves: “I try and look after myself so that I, you know, fit and well for everyone else really, I think it has taken me to get to my late 40’s ... and I think that’s just part of my journey as I’ve gone forward.” (1) and for another “my happiness is much more important” (8). When one participant took the decision to readdress her work life balance and work the hours she was contracted to do, rather than so many additional hours, which she now felt was being taking advantage of and impacting negatively on her home life, as she put it “I wanted to invest in me, spend some time with the children ... but [my manager] said no. So, that kind of made the decision for me to then leave the organisation” (11).

5.3.1.3. Theme 3: Support

The analysis indicated that support of others was an important aspect of women’s career decisions following motherhood. This included support from individuals such as their manager, and partner as well as in relation to childcare. Women also discussed ways in which they provided support to others, and the value of informal as well as formal support networks as they navigated their careers as a mother.

3a. Manager support. This strongly influenced women’s career decisions as managers were involved in discussions around, and provision of factors such as working patterns, policies, and organisational requirements. On the positive side, managers provided beneficial psychological support and encouragement, enabling women to make effective career decisions, and access much needed flexibility in their working pattern.

Managers were also influential over women's career decisions in cases where they did not support flexibility, for some resulting in a working pattern which was ultimately unsustainable. Managers could also directly influence a woman's career progress as in one case where a hiring manager blocked a promotion based on a 3-hour differential in working hours per week.

It was beneficial to subsequent career decisions when, as well as practical support, managers demonstrated understanding of the challenges women may face, such as this woman whose manager "has children, really understands and is really supportive of different working patterns" (14) enabling her to create a pattern that worked for her. Although for some women having a manager who also had children did not necessarily mean they would be supportive such as for one whose company was "run by two women, one of whom had two children... but there was really no flexibility" (4). The gender of the manager was discussed, such as for one woman, who stated: "I don't think I would ever go back to a job where I knew that my [manager] or senior person was going to be female" (10).

The interviews highlighted some managers' ambivalence even while in the process of granting flexibility, for example one manager expressed their regret at having granted a flexible working week for another team member, due to her perception that this set a precedent that, in the participants words "women think that they can have a day when they are not working" (17). This participant explained she was seeking to work from home one day a week, so would be working, and for her this highlighted a lack of support and a negative perception around working from home versus working a short week, which was not the same thing, but equated in her manager's eyes.

In some cases, even when managers provided support, it did not always have a positive impact, in one case a manager saying to a woman she didn't have to attend a particular meeting, was interpreted by the mother as she was not wanted. Another case where a participant was told by her manager that a change in role was "a good thing because it meant that I could focus on being a mum ... and not have to have the stress" which she saw as "a kick in the teeth really" (17). For her, attempts by her manager to be supportive were received negatively and perceived as poor treatment due to being a mother resulting in her starting to look for opportunities elsewhere.

3b. Partner Support. Many of the women who participated cited the support, or lack of, from a partner as an important influence on their career decisions. For five of the women, this started with significant discussions with partners before career decision-making. Such discussions highlighted the interaction between women's work and that of their partners and this was part of the decision making for example, with regards financial considerations, particularly when the partner's salary was higher: "unless they were jobs that paid more than my husband's, it couldn't be an option for me" (13). One woman reflected over the content of such discussions observing that at no stage did she ask her partner if he wanted to be the one to stay at home.

The absence of partner support was an important influence, including the partner's work perceived as taking precedence: "he is the breadwinner in the family" (17) and "he is the main breadwinner and has first dibs on time" (1).

3c. Childcare. Considerations around childcare support were important for all participants, regardless of role or personal situation, and influenced many career decisions. Having suitable childcare was a key factor and included both formal and informal arrangements. For some women, a lack of family support was instrumental, particularly early on. Some women were influenced by having a close family member involved in childcare, for one, influencing her choice to return to work comfortable in the knowledge that if her daughter "couldn't be with me, being with family was second best" (6). Others found a more formal arrangement for childcare preferable. The availability and requirements of childcare impacted on decisions around how many days to work or even whether to return, as for this woman: "I could justify going back to work and leaving the kids in childcare if I knew that ... four days a week they were with me ... if that balance tipped the other way, I remember feeling a little bit uncomfortable" (13).

For many, having responsibility for childcare arrangements resulted in pressure which impacted directly on career decision making. Over half described being solely responsible, words used included having majority of responsibility, being primary carer and solo parenting. Even those who acknowledged the support of a partner felt the pressure of responsibility for organising, arranging or practicalities which drove subsequent decisions.

3d. Support of others. The women's accounts also revealed other ways in which support influenced their career decisions, for example support of peers, colleagues or other networks which influenced decisions in their career. In one case the support of others meant being able to stay in their career during the tough times, for one woman who appreciated the "sounding boards" and supporting decisions, whilst reminding that "children grow up so quickly and ... then you know it will all be different" (6). Having networks of other mothers also helped in seeing alternative career options as for this mother "gain information because I feel like by sharing that information it helps you get a different perspective and like understand what, perhaps, what other options are out there... you weren't aware of" (17). In addition, women reported finding it useful to consider what their peers were doing for example with regards their career decisions "what I realised is I knew very few women who hadn't changed their careers for their kids, and I suppose that gave me a little bit of validation around that" (4). Finally, some women reported they saw few others like them, particularly in certain sectors including finance or technology (see also theme 4a. Organisational culture). One woman lamented the lack of "role models" which could have helped "to work through certain career decisions" (11), which influenced her decisions.

5.3.1.4. Theme 4: Accessing Flexible Work

Responses from participants suggested that many viewed the availability of flexibility in their work as a significant influence on their decisions. This referred not only to the availability of flexible working options such as through policies and procedures, but also to the organisational culture and climate within which these policies operate which was of some importance. Additionally, the theme covers the ways in which women sought and accessed control over their working hours which was important to them. It further demonstrated a potential blurring of boundaries which was something experienced by some respondents, influencing how they managed their careers and working lives alongside children as well as the subsequent decisions they made.

4a. Organisational climate/culture. Women described ways in which the culture of their organisation influenced their decisions. This included moves towards flexible working in their organisation over recent years, including more recognition of those with caring responsibilities in

the workplace. Such changes influenced women's continued engagement with their workplace. Indeed, others who experienced a less supportive culture, one which demonstrated little flexibility, or not in support of flexible working including working from home, impacted on their subsequent decisions. For those women, decisions included leaving the role, leading a few women to start working for themselves. Culture was influential in other ways for example one participant spoke of the pressure she placed on herself and her decision to demonstrate commitment to her workplace "from the beginning [of motherhood] by being present" (17). This woman saw this as her choice, although also reflected on the culture of presenteeism in her office, with little opportunity for flexibility.

For two women working flexibly was less about working part-time, but rather working more manageable hours, compared to the very long hours they had previously worked. This was partly in response to a long working hours culture. As one woman reflected being no longer "able to give it as much as [previously]" (2) which ultimately led her to leave. Another requested flexible working following her children to "get a better home life balance" and wanting "to do more like, you know maybe 40 hours a week, or you know maybe the 35 hours that I was actually paid to do in that organisation". The request was turned down which in her words "kind of made the decision for me to then leave the organisation" (11).

Many women described a male-dominated working environment, which resulted in decisions which fit in with the norms. Some felt isolated, without support of others in a similar position. For others this meant taking part in events which were challenging when their babies were very young. Two mothers decided to attend work events involving travel very early on, for one due to the "very male dominated workforce and organisation" (14) and another to prove she would do it, a bit of advice her husband provided to reassure the organisation of her continued commitment to her role, despite being a mother.

Other women reflected on the attraction of certain sectors or roles after becoming mothers due to perceptions around flexibility including the public sector being more flexible and family friendly, as opposed to the private sector: "private sector at that point was not going to give me flexible

working” (11), and for another woman approached for a role which would mean leaving the public sector where she “considered the job security [in the public sector] what that meant as a parent and having that stability and security ... so didn’t go with the private sector opportunity” (14). Also, self-employment was perceived positively as a flexible choice, for one woman “works brilliantly with my family and commitments” (15).

4b. Policies/procedures. The presence of existing flexible working policies provided a helpful structure for women to follow in their own decisions, particularly when clearly understood by the manager. Existing policies appeared to influence women’s decisions around what pattern to work; for example, “three days was a good compromise, I thought that that is something that work would go for ... there was a precedence set” (6). In this case, and others, the women themselves were required to let the organisation know what pattern would work for them. Indeed, as one woman reflected “No one actually sat down with me ... I had to be, this is what I would like, will you support it” (6). This indicates that responsibility was placed on the individual to work out and present a working pattern, which had a clear precedent, rather than consider what might work for them.

4c. Control over working hours. Women discussed ways in which they created a working pattern which worked for them, based on hours, tasks, or remote working including, “get to work really early and then try and get back to pick them up” (12), “to make it work I had to start work at 7 o’clock in the morning to manage childcare” (13). Having this option was important to them. They also discussed the importance of autonomy and control in relation to flexible working: including feeling “quite autonomous in terms of some of the changes I have been able to make, ... balance out the responsibilities” (14). It was important to these women to have control and leave at certain times if they needed to “survive those long hours” (16). Having control was seen by one woman to make her “a much better worker” (10).

Some women reflected on the benefit of making certain changes or creating certain boundaries in their work after becoming mothers, which often occurred once some time had passed in their experience of being a mother. One mother, a business owner, explained she “got smarter with my

time, I didn't waste time on things, just, priorities changed" (7), which she felt enabled her to make better business decisions. Another self-employed mother who had chosen not to work during school holidays and had kept it "secret" recently "got quite brave about saying it" (4) which also reflected the perceptions of others on her availability and working patterns.

4d. Blurring boundaries. Some women shared examples of blurring boundaries, which resulted in stress. One woman who initially chose to work a part-time pattern after returning to work spoke of the persistent calls from her manager outside of her working hours. She eventually increased her hours to reduce the stress as she felt she was doing the work anyway, although it meant sacrificing time with her children. Another woman also described increasing her hours to full time as she was working longer hours anyway and "might as well get paid for it" (13).

In response to the blurring boundaries, women described how introducing even simple changes or rituals helped separate them from the responsibilities of motherhood whereby even getting a cup of tea when entering the office felt like statement of control, for one woman who explained "I've done drop off, I'm doing that, I'll have my cup of tea before I start work" (15). For some, taking control over their hours involved "a big learning curve" (5) and a challenge to start communicating their new part time hours, as they reported feeling obliged to respond and that they were somehow letting people down by being part-time and therefore not always available, as previously.

5.3.1.5. Theme 5: Career Progress

The final theme looked at career progress which was related to the ways in which women perceived and experienced their own career progress following motherhood and the opportunities available to them. The subthemes referred to the ways in which women approached their career planning, and the progress of their career after being a mother, and how it has changed. Also covered in this theme are the frustrations experienced in terms of progress and the sacrifices made along the way, as well as dearth of opportunities available with suitable conditions for working mothers. This theme also included how women's perceptions around staying or leaving their organisation are influenced by motherhood.

5a. Planning and progress. Some women described how motherhood influenced their career plans. Many explained they had no clear career plan, others a clear and “rigid” one (12). One woman explained her current focus is the family “I don’t know where my career is going next, ... at the moment I want to make sure I don’t drop the ball with family life” (5) although she also explained she is pursuing additional study which indicated a level of career planning and alternative career path.

Some spoke of gaining additional qualifications and added study to the existing pressures, to further progress their career after having children. For some it was ultimately too much, for others it was possible only with the support of a partner or their organisation. Additional ways of progressing came through voluntary experience, driven by a desire to support others, such as those less fortunate, and valuing pursuit of meaningful activities on top of their work and family life. For example, “I like, ... the variety, people, making a difference, innovation, sort of maybe coaching people a little bit and improving things” (5).

5b. Career frustrations. Some women saw growth and development in their career, although perhaps not at the speed at which they would have liked. Many described the frustrations and gaps along the way and reflected on sacrifices made. This included missed opportunities “I couldn’t go for certain career options I wanted to because I was still, I still had to be there for the drop off and pick up” (13) or seeing others progress “stuck in a post, for three or four years when I saw other peers, without the same caring responsibilities progress” (14). As indicated here, women experienced difficulties with career progress, which was on at least one woman’s mind even before having children who described being “frightened about what [having children] would do to my career” (11). Some women had started to rebuild their career from having lost out “in the first couple of years, after my daughter was born” (8).

5c. Lack of opportunities. This sub-theme related to the participant’s perceived availability of suitable options, particularly regarding flexibility and for some specifically at more senior levels which influenced their decisions around career progress. For one woman “my big fear was ... I’ll never get a job at this level part-time; you never see them advertised like that” (13), “I’d like ideally

to work part-time, in the same kind of high-level position, but there's few opportunities available around that" (9). Also, there was lack of opportunities for any form of part-time work: "The jobs that are available for mums aren't really that good... especially if you are looking for part time work" (7). For one woman who became self-employed, employment was not even an option: "it would be really hard to get the flexibility that I wanted, so I didn't even think about it" (2)

5d. Moving Roles/Organisations. The analysis highlighted decisions including to remain in or to move from their current organisation linked to motherhood. For example, some women decided to move from their current position to gain "more flexibility" (18) and due to "location... not having to travel" (10) or timing as "it just wasn't working out, time wise, being a mum" (8). One woman wanted more challenge as she "grew out of that role... not developing" (9). For others, motherhood brought enough pressure, and challenge was not a motivator. One woman moved roles even though she could see "it's not a job I am going to enjoy, but it's easy, I can literally, you know, not think about anything" (8), and another chose to stay in her role as she "just didn't want that extra pressure" (18).

Many of the women experienced some conflict in terms of the decisions to stay with or leave their organisation following motherhood. They considered this "a tricky decision, because I was consciously making a decision to, not be, there in the morning when the kids woke up, and perhaps sometimes not be there to put them into bed on an evening" (14) as well as the impact on their organisation "equally I didn't want to give up on them, I felt that was unfair" (12).

After children, women found the familiarity within their current role as a source of comfort: "the idea of getting up and starting brand new somewhere again, probably was a bit too overwhelming as well" (13). Lack of confidence was an issue around this time also – "I guess I didn't feel confident about myself and that's probably why I didn't make the move at that time" (18). See sub theme 2c. for more on confidence. Flexibility and location were also important reasons for women to stay in their role. In addition, women mentioned the importance of their current benefits, particularly around maternity leave: "you end up somewhere new and you don't get the same amount of benefits do you when you've been there for a few years or so" (18). Timing around moving roles

was highlighted by a couple of participants who explained “because of not wanting to go to another company and then go off on maternity leave quite quickly, I did feel a bit stuck I guess” (9).

5e. Impact on career. Participants described the impact of being a mother on their career in terms of the decisions made at different stages, including decisions around working full or part time and of how decisions made at different stages then impacted on subsequent decisions for them “that decision I made then completely influenced my career choices for the next five years plus” (13). Some women recognised how different their careers were now, to what was envisaged “I had in my mind right how’s this going to affect my career blah di blah and it just completely that all went out your life is turned upside down when you become a mum or a parent” (20). For some the impact of motherhood was focusing: being now “far less spontaneous, far, much more fixed about either because it was the only thing I could do, or because I had to make some far more strategic decisions” (13) and that having children may provide opportunities to take stock as “there are step changes that happen so you do get a chance to re-evaluate and to make decisions.. being a parent, you do get nudged into re-evaluating on a regular basis.” (4).

5.4. Discussion

This study sought to build on the previous review of current research by developing an understanding of the experiences and career decisions of a sample of UK working mothers. Through their own understanding of these issues, and of the factors they identify as influencing career-related decisions which is a valuable addition to the literature (McIntosh et al., 2012), and in response to the research question, ‘how does motherhood influence the careers of working mothers, from their own perspective?’. There was a wealth of information provided by women in this study which suggests that for the participants, being a mother does impact on their careers in many ways. These impacts can occur for some women before they have children and can persist through their career as their children grow. The women interviewed provided many examples of ways in which becoming a mother impacted on their career decisions including to remain in their career, to make changes to their career or working patterns, or even to leave their role, for some

by choice, for others seeing no alternative. These women represented only a small selection; however, their responses suggest that they needed to take responsibility and carve out or choose their own path, making use of the resources available to them, which included for some deciding their own working patterns, on top of the bulk of responsibility for childcare.

Women described changes and conflicts associated with their role as mother and worker, and difficulties associated with the shifts between. Some described changes in their identity which influenced their career after becoming mothers. Identity transition may be considered a process of disengagement from one central identity through the exploration of several new identities until an alternative becomes integrated (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). In the case of mother and worker, there may be a period within which individuals might be feeling 'in between' identities; whereby one's identity is not yet fully formed such as the time between becoming pregnant and returning to the workplace as a mother, potentially leaving women feeling un-anchored with an identity which is unclear or poorly defined (Greenberg et al., 2016). This further suggests that this in-between identity may also occur at later stages for women with children, beyond the transition from pregnancy to return to work for example during the later stages when children are older including entering different phases of their development which also impacts on the mother.

Such changes in identity in the participants have typically been considered most apparent during the early transition to working motherhood, reflecting the research indicating that careers are impacted most strongly when children are younger (McIntosh et al., 2012). Indeed, some participants spoke of identity loss experienced in this early time, in addition to recognising the hard work in developing or maintaining professional reputations or status, the impact of such a loss was a particularly difficult one. However, for some, having a professional identity was a protective factor, providing a focus for them in terms of their continued engagement with their career once they had become mothers. Previous research has highlighted professional identity can be a protective factor against burnout (Maor & Hemi, 2021). Some reflected on their hard work to build up their career and professional reputation while having a family, of how challenging it was to hold on to that, alongside their responsibilities at home. There were suggestions this became easier

over time, however equally involved some difficult decisions in terms of how to manage and prioritise roles later also. The psychological burden therefore did not disappear, it shifted and changed, and support was required at later stages also, for example to manage the practical aspects of children's schooling and after school activities. It also emerged that some women were clearer on what they needed at the later stages, and so were either more confident to ask for certain patterns, locations, or in what they would put up with as regards fitting in with the organisation or unsupportive managers. Several women said they would not go into the employment of others again, another said they would never be managed by a woman again, one participant was in dispute with a manager over inflexible working patterns, and another turned down a role which did not offer the desired working conditions. These all demonstrated the lines drawn by these women, and all later in their career suggesting that at this stage they were demonstrating more confidence in seeking what they wanted or were making decisions which were influenced by earlier experiences. This could also indicate the importance of seeking balance in mid-career, based on experience of managing work and children (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006).

Alongside changes in and loss of identities, this study also highlighted how women are shifting between identities, from being a mother to worker and vice versa, and the associated difficulties. Such role switching reportedly influenced how well women felt they could engage with their work, causing some to question their ability to continue working at all. Previous research indicates that the presence of separate identities can be positive if these identities do not interfere with each other, however issues may arise if the two identities collide (Hodges & Park, 2013) and may result in feelings of guilt (Stockey-Bridge, 2015) a perceived inability to live up to the ideal in both (Rubin & Wooten, 2007, Hodges & Park, 2013). This was seen in this study, highlighting the importance of support and psychological resources to manage conflicting identities.

Our research findings also demonstrated ways in which some women were perceived differently in their careers after motherhood, for example being perceived as less committed to, or lacking focus on their work after children. While research indicates working mothers demonstrate similar levels of commitment to their organisation as peers (Chang et al., 2014), some decisions relating to

motherhood and career such as length of maternity leave can impair perceptions of competence in the workplace (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017). In addition, perceptions of mothers appear to be influenced by gendered norms and the lower value of care work in society in contrast to paid work (Richardson & Schaeffer, 2013). Recent research has shown that for both genders, even briefly de-prioritising their parenting role, or professional role, can result in lower perceptions of competence in those spheres by others (Sanzari et al., 2021).

We found that women also individualised or internalised decisions, in many cases believing that the responsibility for the decisions lay with them alone. This is in line with the boundaryless career theory, suggesting that individuals are increasingly responsible for career decisions (Hall, 2002, Hirschi, 2012) as well as individuals improving their own chances through investing in employability (Rothwell & Arnold, 2005). Women also experienced conflicts within their decision making, with many describing feelings such as guilt and stress at various stages. However, the study also demonstrated other more positive internalisation, such as ways in which women are drawing on their strengths and the importance for them of feeling validated in their decision making. Such validation often occurred later from the decisions, although clearly was important for them. In addition, having the time to reflect on their decisions was a valuable experience for many. This showed up towards the end of the interviews where participants openly appreciated the time spent reflecting, an unintentional benefit of taking part in the research. This represents a positive, unanticipated, outcome of the interview process; where women benefited from being 'listened to' and reflecting on and revisiting some of their experiences, something also seen in other research of a similar nature (Noon & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020).

The results also highlighted various ways in which women were seeking, gaining or in many cases not receiving support from others, reinforcing the importance of various forms of support including from managers, the organisation, and others. Women described many instances where they had approached or had discussions with managers, some of which were positive, others less so. There is a wealth of research into supervisor support being important for many positive outcomes such as wellbeing (Guidetti et al., 2018), career success (Lee & Lee, 2018), successful return to work

after sick leave (Janssen et al., 2003), negatively related to work-family conflict (Kossek et al., 2011). However, little empirical work has demonstrated the importance of supervisor support in creating a positive return to work following maternity leave. Additionally, it is important to recognise that supportiveness of the supervisor will vary from person to person and should involve giving a mother what she wants for example in leave or hours rather than what is perceived she needs (Grether & Wiese, 2016). The analysis also showed the benefits of having networks or connections with others in a similar position which was demonstrated to have a protective effect.

The supervisor relationship was important even before the individual has started in the role, an example from one interview participant described a manager effectively 'blocking' her access to a promotion due to an issue around working hours. Another described a manager who regularly demonstrated their explicit power over her access to flexible working. This power was influential over their access to certain decisions and impacted on their future decisions as the women described how it impacted on their levels of trust in future managers. The research revealed that for some women, having managers who were more 'aware' of the challenges of balancing work and motherhood, because of their own experiences for example, was helpful, and this was not necessarily women. Indeed, some participants experienced poor support from women managers who had negative experiences themselves, which was self-perpetuating, whereby the female manager had managed their own childcare and so expected this of the employee, regardless of their own situation. This participant concluded she would not be managed by a woman again.

According to prior research, women tend to look at job opportunities differently from men, more likely to see their careers as one piece of their life, and therefore to integrate the other pieces such as family and relationships, into a holistic sense of self (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). This relational perspective is also related to women's career sacrifices due to children (Leahy & Doughney, 2006) including delaying having children so they can pursue their career (Martin, 2021). The current research supported this with examples of career gaps, reduced career prospects and career sacrifices, supporting previous literature on lost occupational status (Abendroth et al., 2014) and career progress (Aisenbrey et al., 2009). Women in this study largely described having primary or

sole responsibility for children's care and these results indicated that the availability and requirements of childcare impacted on decisions around how many days to work or even whether to return. These research findings also suggested that for women with children being flexible is also about being accepting of how needs change over time, and the different transitions over time highlighted the importance of flexibility in terms of working pattern. Recently, due to the Covid pandemic, closures of schools and childcare providers increased caregiving responsibilities for parents, for example mothers reducing work hours up to five times more often than fathers, further increasing the gender gap in work hours (Collins et al., 2021) and unpaid work time for women much higher during lockdown than before it although there was a slight increase in childcare for fathers (Craig & Churchill, 2021). Research into paid and unpaid labour gained pace due to the pandemic (Guy & Arthur, 2020; Tso & Parikh, 2021) although it has been an issue prior to this, exacerbated by the environmental and societal challenges, which the pandemic has really brought this to the fore. It is vitally important that lessons are learned from the pandemic however, it should also be recognised that the issues faced were not purely due to the pandemic.

The study demonstrated that many changes were experienced as relatively short term, something which was a source of comfort for some especially during the more difficult early years and enabled them to continue to engage in their career, despite encountering difficulties along the way. Some women were also influenced by the longer-term impact of gaps in their career related to having children, including time away for example on maternity leave, as well as the impact of reducing hours. Research in this area has been somewhat mixed, indicating that effects of career gaps may diminish as women age (Kahn et al., 2014) or may be longer lasting (McIntosh et al., 2012).

The long working hours culture experienced by some women, and the lack of support from their organisation, ultimately led some to leave their organisation, something which is reflected in previous research which looked at factors leading some women to disengage and withdraw from their workplaces (Lim & Rasdi, 2019). The findings also reflected that for women working in male-dominated organisations, or one where women are not as well represented, can have a negative

impact in terms of accessing flexible working. This reveals how women's occupational working patterns may be influenced by the presence of others, thereby reducing likelihood of choosing professions which are considered more male stereotyped (Richardson & Schaeffer, 2013).

The research highlighted the lack of options available for flexible working including for women in more senior positions who felt that sufficient opportunities were not available to them. These factors could be influencing penalties in occupational status (Abendroth et al., 2014) and career punishment (Aisenbrey et al., 2009). Previous research has shown that women are less likely than men to report positive promotion prospects, in part due to women's increased family responsibilities and lower hours resulting in lower confidence levels in terms of promotions, as well as cultural expectations around family work as 'women's work' thus reducing women's perceptions of promotion chances (Wynn, 2017). This reinforces the value of government initiatives around improving flexible working options, as well as campaigns to bring more transparency and accessibility to flexible working options for all employees (O'Grady, 2019).

The findings from this study also demonstrated ways in which the meaning or purpose derived from their work supported working mothers. This influenced participant's decisions, for some to remain in their work after family, and for others to leave and follow self-employment. This has been shown in other research around factors leading more and more women to seek out self-employment where they can achieve more autonomy and a sense of achievement (Lim & Rasdi, 2019). August (2011) identified challenge as a key factor in later life career development, and in their KCM model Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) recognised that whilst balance and authenticity were more of a priority for women in later career stages, the presence of challenge does remain a strong motivating force throughout their careers (Alshabani & Soto, 2020). The current study suggests that some women might seek to be challenged by their career, in which case a supportive context with flexibility, is a key factor in realising that. Indeed, it is possible that even for those pursuing less challenge in their role, the support of the working environment may be related to such decisions. Therefore, women may be motivated to continue to work outside the home by roles which provided opportunities for stretch (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). In addition, it is possible

that the time away from the workplace has somehow influenced such considerations of meaning, as highlighted by Cabrera (2007) such time away may encourage reflection and clarity over career wants and needs including increasing knowledge of why one is engaging with work.

5.5. Study strengths and limitations

This study provided a valuable opportunity to explore the psychological factors influencing women's career decisions, which is vital to exploring the factors influencing women's careers from their own perspectives. Due to the design of the research question, participants were invited to explore career decisions as far back as before becoming a mother. This allowed for the research participants to reflect on ways in which motherhood has impacted on career decisions in the widest possible context of their career, which is a strength of the study. Conversely it also resulted in those involved discussing both current and prior experiences which could have added some possible limitations with regards to accuracy. This was supported through data checking for two participants, no amendments were requested to the data. The purpose of the narrative interview is to gather data from participants based on their own narrative or construction of events therefore accuracy is less important than their own perception of the events, which after all is their reality.

Further, while the narrative interview approach provides the space to participants to tell their story in their own way, without prompting, unless required, it does rely on the confidence or competence of participants in terms of communicating their experience (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The initiation phase was conducted both in writing and in person prior to the interview to provide as much information as possible to support the participants' understanding (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2007). Nonetheless, some participants appeared more confident than others in doing so, requiring little reassurance, which may have impacted on the level of detail provided. For the current study, participants were all women with children, as per design, and so the views of women without children are not captured, which could further demonstrate the factors influencing decision making for all women compared to women with children specifically. To gain the perspective of all women and thus understand the potential differences for those with children a comparative study will be

conducted next which will involve a wider group of participants and using quantitative analysis to allow for larger numbers.

As described in 5.2.1., 4 of the 20 participants were known to the researcher prior to the research, through working in the same organisation in the past. A further limitation of the current study is the career types included which may allow participants more option for choice in comparison to other careers. For example, having a professional qualification and educational qualifications may be beneficial, and protective against the penalty of motherhood, although research on this has been mixed, some supporting a higher penalty for those more highly educated (Anderson et al., 2002) little impact of education or occupational variables (Staff & Mortimer, 2012) yet others finding higher wage penalties for lower educated women (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia, 2020).

Whilst there is a range of ages of mothers and children, the age demographic of participants may be considered relatively limited, with some of the participants in the older age group of mothers, with older children. There is also less representation of younger mothers experiencing career decision-making. Whilst this fits with the overall study design to explore the career decisions of women with children beyond the focus on pregnancy and maternity which exists in the literature, the representation of the decisions of younger-aged women is important. More research which has a wider contrast of age, educational and/or occupational variation could thus add helpful insight. Finally, the use of thematic analysis allowed for a deep exploration of the psychological factors influencing women with children's career decisions. It would also be beneficial to take a wider perspective to explore the patterns in perceptions of psychological factors, which is enabled by a quantitative survey approach.

5.6. Next steps in the research

Overall, the results show that for many women with children in their career decisions, they have relied to a great extent on the individual resources available to them, as well as relationships and support around them. The current thesis has previously recognised the rise of the boundaryless career and the resulting increase in the individualisation of careers towards ones more self-

directed in nature, thus reinforcing the relevance of individual career resources (Hirschi, 2012). This is also supported in the current data, where, alongside structural and organisational features, from a psychological perspective it is important for women with children to recognise and draw on their own resources and confidence in their abilities when making decisions related to their career. This psychological work is an important feature of being a working mother and relies on the individual's ability to draw on the resources available to them as also seen in the increasing individualisation of the current career landscape. A wider consideration of these individual factors for women with children and those without would be a valuable addition, as highlighted in 1.5.3., and explored in the next study.

In the literature review (chapter 2), it was pointed out that various contextual and individual factors are combining to create a complex set of processes within which working mothers are navigating their careers and career decisions (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia, 2020; Whitmarsh et al., 2007). Prior research on women's careers has identified specific links with regards to human capital, such as skills, knowledge, and experience, as well as social capital, such as networks of relationships (O'Neil et al., 2008). This is also demonstrated in the findings of the systematic review in the previous chapter, which additionally found evidence of the influence of personal resources on the careers of working mothers, indicating that motherhood impacts on levels of confidence in using one's resources, which influences subsequent career decisions.

The current qualitative research has highlighted the importance of self-efficacy to the career decisions of working mothers in relation to the impact on confidence which interacted with use of resources, as women described shifts over time impacting on their energy in using resources and making career decisions. The evidence pointed to the influence of perceptions of confidence in terms of seeking out roles and managing career challenges. Perceptions of efficacy were impacted in terms of returning to work and discussing work patterns or flexible working. Their perceptions around self-efficacy also influenced employability, as well as career decisions, for example women opting to remain with their current employer due to lower confidence in ability at the time

sometimes in the earlier years of motherhood but other examples showed more persistence across time.

The final discussion brings together the findings so far, along with those of the third and final study which explores the link between self-efficacy and employability in relation to career success for women with and without children in the workplace. An important construct to careers (see section 2.2.), self-efficacy determines what an individual does with their perceived resources (Lent & Hackett, 1987) and positively influences individual career decisions (Betz & Hackett, 2006) boosting career satisfaction and successful career development (Hirschi, 2012; Rigotti et al., 2018). Thus, investigating the relationship between this psychological factor, employability, and being a mother will make an important and valuable contribution to the literature.

Chapter 6: Exploring perceptions of self-efficacy, employability and career success and the impact of motherhood for working women in the United Kingdom.

6.1. Introduction

This chapter will explore the impact of psychological resources on employability and career success, concepts valuable to the career journey as established in 2.2 and 2.3. As discussed, the career literature in recent years depicts a landscape which relies less on the organisation and on traditional boundaries between roles and organisations, to one which is increasingly individualised (Akkermans et al., 2018; Arthur et al., 2005; Coleman & Thomas, 2017), and self-driven (Hirschi, 2012; Rojewski et al., 2017). These developments have brought to the fore the importance of psychological factors such as self-efficacy (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019) and employability (Williams et al., 2015) to career success. This is important for women with children, with family responsibilities impacting negatively on women's availability of time for work (Trappe et al., 2015) career progress (Daly, 2002; Gracia & Esping-Andersen, 2015, Young, 2018) and confidence may also be impacted (Broadnax, 2016). There have also been recent calls for more research on the cognitive aspects of managing work and life (Dishon-Berkovits, 2021, Leslie et al. 2019).

This third and final study will explore the relationship between the psychological factor of self-efficacy on employability and career success for women with and without children, in response to the question 'How do the psychological resources of self-efficacy impact on employability and career success for working women with and without children?'. These factors are linked to the career decisions research, and this study takes a quantitative approach to address the research question, opening by expanding the key concepts under exploration, including self-efficacy, employability, and objective career success, to further explain their relevance to the literature and current research thesis. This is followed by a description of the research hypotheses emerging from the above research question.

6.2. Key concepts

6.2.1. General Self-efficacy

A construct of social cognitive theory, popular in research literature, self-efficacy describes and is defined as an individual's own beliefs about their ability to carry out a behaviour effectively (Bandura, 1977). It is a dynamic aspect of the self which interacts with the external environment, internal motivations, and personal skills and capabilities (Bandura, 1986), influencing what people do with the skills they have (Lent & Hackett, 1987). Bandura proposed four ways to develop self-efficacy. The first and most effective way to build self-efficacy is through mastery of experiences, second social modelling, witnessing demonstrations of competence by people like them. Thirdly he proposed learning occurs through social persuasion, such as when a person is told that they have what it takes to succeed, they are more likely to achieve success and finally the impact of states of physiology, such as emotions, moods, and physical states, with our ability to succeed reduced by weariness and a low mood for example (Bandura, 2008).

Research has indicated that positive perceptions of self-efficacy can facilitate behaviours such as setting goals, investing effort, persisting in the face of adversity, or picking oneself up after a set-back (Chhajer et al., 2018; Grunert & Bodner, 2011; Hirsch et al., 2018) and result in outcomes such as global self-esteem, locus of control, and emotional stability (Song & Chon, 2012), all potentially career enhancing. Individuals with higher general self-efficacy are also more likely to set goals and to approach more difficult goals (Taylor & Wilson, 2019). Self-efficacy positively influences adaptation to change, is a positive predictor of self-initiated change linked to employability (Schyns et al., 2007) and influences the sustainability of a career (Kelly et al., 2020).

6.2.2. Career Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy can also be domain specific including with regards to ones' career or occupation (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013). When applied to the career domain, self-efficacy relates to behaviours specifically associated with career-related decisions and adaptation (Betz & Hackett, 1981). Such domain specific self-efficacy relates to how an individual sees their ability to put in

place the necessary actions to “effectively manage occupational roles and career issues” (Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al., 2015, p.41) and is essential to decision making with regards to careers (Noon & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020).

Increased career related self-efficacy for example, can improve career decision making (Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000) and the more confident people are in their decision-making abilities, the more likely they are to actively pursue their career options (Betz & Hackett, 1981). Research proposes that women’s career choices are influenced and even restricted by their own beliefs around career self-efficacy, even more than other individual factors such as interests, values, and abilities (Betz & Hackett, 1981) and low levels of career-related self-efficacy contribute to perceptions of lower productivity (Dickson, 2019).

Evidence also shows that on specific task accomplishment, employees with higher self-efficacy will perform better than those with lower self-efficacy, likely due to increased efforts resulting from the increased belief of efficacy, producing more successful outcomes (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2002). It is no surprise therefore that career self-efficacy has a positive impact on career success, as measured by salary, status, or career satisfaction (Abele & Spurk, 2009). Research has also confirmed its relationship towards successful adjustment in employment for specific groups such as working mothers (Houle et al., 2009). Indeed, research has shown that career related self-efficacy can be negatively influenced by high demands and emotional strain (Rigotti et al., 2018), of importance in the context of the careers of working mothers who often experience high demands on time and family commitments (Berger, 2018).

6.2.3. *Employability*

As outlined in the introduction, with the relevance of lifetime employment diminishing and being replaced with multiple roles and employers over the course of one’s career, the notion of employability is noteworthy (Colakoglu, 2011). Defined as “the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competences” (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2005, p.453) employability fits with the requirement for individuals to develop different sets of

behaviours which adapt and change over time. Employability has been described as a benchmark for career success (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008) or route to future career success (Bloch & Bates, 1995) and linked with individual outcomes such as career success and employee wellbeing (DeCuyper et al., 2014). Research has demonstrated relationships between employability and behaviours such as active adaptability which supports employees in the seeking out and realising of career opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004). Previous research has shown that employability mediates the relationship between emotional self-efficacy and career satisfaction (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013). Recently, as also presented in the introduction, there have been calls for a more sustainable career perspective, one which recognises individual and contextual elements related to career management and promotes the shared responsibility of employer and employee (Van der Heijden et al., 2020).

However, whilst employability research has been receiving more attention, looking at the concept through the lens of women's careers has not been afforded the same focus, with research on careers still largely based on male career patterns (Whitmarsh et al., 2007; Kmec et al., 2014). This, despite employability and work-family conflict being closely aligned to the contemporary, more boundaryless, career (Wille et al., 2013). Much of the literature on employability considers the graduate experience, reinforcing its relevance to earlier stages of the career journey even though employability is a lifelong pursuit, with no one point in time where it may be considered complete (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Tomlinson, 2012). Employers are recognising the competitive advantage from supporting an older and more experienced workforce (de Grip et al., 2020) and research has examined employability for older workers, emphasising the growth of an aging population with more employees working later in life (Vandenberghe et al., 2013). Such age-related employability research considers the impact of older age on employability rather than on life transitions per se. Employability is less well covered in the literature for mid- or later-life stages, suggesting more research over the life course and across more career phases would add value. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to understand if and how employability is impacted by varying

career transitions for women including around family responsibilities, given the relevance of employability across the life course and the impact of different life stages.

6.2.4. Objective career success

Career success is defined as the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from one's work experiences (Seibert et al., 2001). Research considers career success in objective and subjective terms with the former relating to the observable measures of career success such as income or number of career promotions (Ng et al., 2005). The latter on the other hand, relating to more intrinsic values, which may include judgements of job and career satisfaction (Burke, 2001; Judge et al., 1995), levels of human capital (Stumpf, 2010) or self-worth (Chang et al., 2012). Some authors argue that subjective career success is in fact a result of objective success (Nicholson & De Waal-Andrews, 2005) although such links may be overestimated (Abele & Spurk, 2009). This study includes the more observable forms due to the objective nature, as a measurable outcome, and to balance the more subjective measures of self-efficacy and employability (see 6.4.2.4. for details of measures).

Results from a study on the impact of parenthood on objective career success found a negative impact on objective career success for mothers due to reductions in workload and career interruptions, and a positive effect for men's objective career success, independent of workload (Abele, 2014). More research would help to understand the predictors of career success in the context of career transition and life span, for example resource accumulation and dynamics (Spurk et al., 2019). The current study aims to address this gap, with a focus on objective career success, to counterbalance the more subjective self-report measures of self-efficacy and employability.

6.3. The current study

As seen in the current research, higher self-efficacy can support greater career success, for example, individuals with higher levels of SE are more likely to pursue tasks in which they believe themselves to be more efficacious and therefore lead to more successful outcomes. The current research will investigate women's perceptions of their self-efficacy, in other words their ability to

make use of their resources; an important factor in career progression (Betz & Hackett, 1997). In addition, the research will consider the relationship between self-efficacy and how employable women believe themselves to be, in relation to their objective career success. The study further suggests that perceptions of career efficacy will influence how employable a person is likely to perceive themselves to be, which will in turn predict career success. Therefore, the following hypotheses could be formulated:

6.3.1. Hypothesis 1

There will be a positive relationship between general self-efficacy and employability.

6.3.2. Hypothesis 2

There will be a positive relationship between career self-efficacy and employability.

6.3.3. Hypothesis 3

There will be a positive relationship between employability and Objective Career Success.

In addition, previous research has demonstrated that demands on time are high for working mothers due to family commitments which interfere with personal resources (Demerouti et al., 2012) such as perceptions of self-efficacy (Berger, 2018), employability (Berntson et al., 2014) and career success (Ballout, 2008). This study proposes that motherhood will impact on perceptions of employability, when compared to peers without children, resulting in the following hypothesis:

6.3.4. Hypothesis 4

Participants with children will have lower levels of general and career self-efficacy, career success and self-perceived employability than women without children.

Previous research also suggests that individuals in the boundaryless context increasingly require suitable skills and resources to navigate their careers successfully, as well as a belief in their ability to do so. This indicates that having confidence in ones' own ability alone may not lead directly to career success, it is the subsequent perceptions and actions such as those linked to employability which has the important effect on efficacy beliefs, leading to career success. This

view indicates that employability is mediating the relationship between general and career self-efficacy and career success. The current study proposes that the relationship between both forms of self-efficacy and objective career success are mediated by self-perceived employability, as employees require belief in their own ability which leads to perceptions of employability, which results in the career success. This suggests the following hypothesis:

6.3.5. Hypothesis 5

Employability will mediate the relationship between general and career self-efficacy and objective career success.

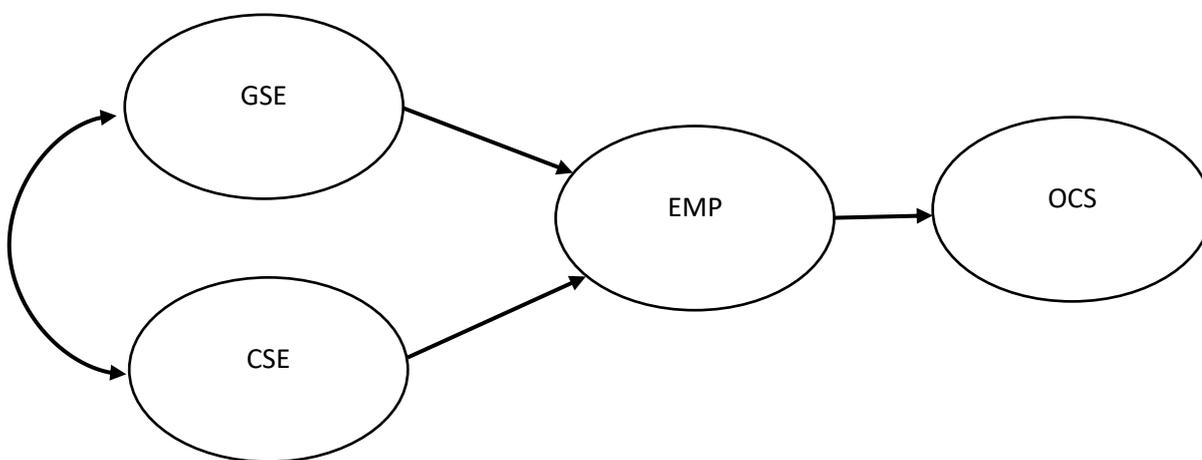


Figure 6.

Hypothesised model with employability as mediator between self-efficacy and Objective Career Success

Finally, as highlighted in the research, working women with children may face additional barriers to career progression. With career related self-efficacy negatively influenced by high demands for example, the demands placed on women with children will impact on their success in the workplace (Rigotti et al., 2018). It would be valuable to know more about if and how these demands may be playing out in the workplace, in relation to perceptions of self-efficacy and employability for working mothers. In this study therefore it is suggested that these challenges may be exacerbated for women with children who face additional family demands, which may influence

the perceptions of employability and subsequent career success. This results in the following and final hypotheses being formulated for this study:

6.3.6. Hypothesis 6

The role of employability as a mediator between self-efficacy and career success will be less strong for women with children.

6.4. Methodology

6.4.1. Participants

A sample of 428 UK working women aged between 18 and 65 years ($\mu = 35.45$, $SD = 11.041$) were included in final analysis. Participants included 222 women with children and 206 women with no children, from different industries/sectors, working in full time and part time roles with qualification levels ranging from O-Level through to Doctoral level. Table 9 presents a breakdown of the participant group in relation to age, working arrangements, sector, role, qualifications, tenure and for those with children the number of children under 18. Roles were classified as operational through to strategic decision making.

Table 9.*Distribution features of sample (women with children, with no children and all participants)*

Statistical variables	Category	Frequency			Percentages of total		
		With children (n=222)	With no children (n=206)	All (N=428)	With children (n=222)	With no children (n=206)	All (N=428)
Age Group	18-24	4	86	90	1.8%	41.7%	21.0%
	25-34	50	70	120	22.5%	34.0%	28.0%
	35-44	89	27	116	40.1%	13.1%	27.1%
	45-54	68	19	87	30.6%	9.2%	20.3%
	55-64	10	4	14	4.5%	1.9%	3.3%
	65 and over	1	0	1	0.5%	0.0%	0.2%
Work Arrangements	Full time	112	101	213	0.2%	49.0%	49.8%
	Part time	98	88	186	44.1%	42.7%	43.5%
	Other	12	17	29	5.4%	8.3%	6.8%
Sector	Public Sector	92	92	184	41.4%	44.7%	43.0%
	Private Sector	108	91	199	48.6%	44.2%	46.5%
	Third Sector	9	12	21	4.1%	5.8%	4.9%
	Other	13	11	24	5.9%	5.3%	5.6%
Role	Operational	66	88	154	29.7%	42.7%	36.0%
	First line management	30	23	53	13.5%	11.2%	12.4%
	Responsibility for work of others/organisational influence	40	27	67	18.0%	13.1%	15.7%
	Senior management responsibility	28	10	38	12.6%	4.9%	8.9%
	Strategic decision-making	33	26	59	14.9%	12.6%	13.8%
	Other	25	32	57	11.3%	15.5%	13.3%
Qualifications	GCSE/O-level or level 2 equivalent	13	27	40	5.9%	13.1%	9.3%
	AS and A-level or level 3 equivalent	41	22	63	18.5%	10.7%	14.7%
	Cert of Higher Education or level 4 equivalent	16	19	35	7.2%	9.2%	10.5%
	Foundation degree or level 5 equivalent	12	10	22	5.4%	4.9%	5.1%
	Bachelor's degree or level 6 equivalent	68	67	135	30.6%	32.5%	31.5%
	Master's degree or level 7 equivalent	45	63	108	20.3%	30.6%	25.2%
Tenure	Doctoral degree or level 8 equivalent	11	14	25	5.0%	6.8%	5.8%
	Less than 1 year	51	25	76	23.0%	12.1%	17.8%
	1 to 3 years	86	58	144	38.7%	28.2%	33.6%
	3 to 6 years	41	43	84	18.5%	20.9%	19.6%
	6 to 9 years	7	31	38	3.2%	15.0%	8.9%
	9 to 12 years	6	24	30	2.7%	11.7%	7.0%
	12 to 20 years	14	30	44	6.3%	14.6%	10.3%
Over 20 years	1	11	12	0.5%	5.3%	2.8%	

6.4.2. Measures

6.4.2.1. General self-efficacy

A 10-item questionnaire was used to measure perceptions of general self-efficacy, from Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) to predict how people may deal with daily stresses or adapt following difficult life events. The scale was designed on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all true to 4 = exactly true. Sample items include 'I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough', 'I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events' and 'When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.' The Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the current study was 0.894. Analysis was based on sum score of responses.

6.4.2.2. Career self-efficacy

The 6-item scale from Rigotti et al. (2008) was used in this study. A validated scale measuring career/occupational self-efficacy, tested across European countries and languages demonstrating structural and construct validity. The scale uses a 6-point Likert with responses ranging from 1=completely true to 6=not at all true. Sample items include 'When I am confronted with a problem in my job, I can usually find several solutions', 'My past experiences in my job prepared me well for my occupational future' and 'I meet my goals that I set for myself in my job'. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the current study was 0.890. During analysis, again based on sum score of responses, the items on this scale were reverse scored to bring the measure in line with the other measures.

6.4.2.3. Employability

The 11-item scale of employability from Rothwell and Arnold (2005) was used, made up of 4 items measuring 'internal' employability and 7 items measuring 'external' employability. This scale was designed to reflect several aspects of employability, as identified by previous research including resilience, networks of contacts for support and information, skills, and knowledge relevant to job seeking. The scale uses a 5-point Likert with responses ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Sample items measuring internal employability include 'my personal networks in this organisation help me in my career' and 'the skills I have gained in my present job are

transferable to other occupations outside this'. Sample items measuring external employability include 'If I needed to, I could easily get another job like mine in a similar organisation' and 'Anyone with my level of skills and knowledge, and similar job and organisational experience, will be highly sought after by employers'. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the current study was 0.849. Analysis again based on sum score of responses.

6.4.2.4. Objective Career success

In this study objective career success was measured in terms of income and occupational prestige (Hirschi et al., 2021) with the addition of organisational responsibility for supervision, management of others, and strategic influence (Abele & Spurk, 2009). This measure was based on the objective career success measure of yes or no responses to three items: 'do you have permission to delegate work?', 'do you have temporary project responsibility?' and 'do you have an official leadership position?' (after Abele & Spurk, 2009).

6.4.2.5. Additional qualitative data

In addition to the instruments above, participants were asked an open text question 'what factors have you found to be supportive or unsupportive to your participation in the workplace?'. This question was designed to gather additional qualitative information to supplement the quantitative information gathered, for deeper understanding of the factors which may be supportive or unsupportive to women in the workplace. See Appendix K for full survey, with the final version provided via Qualtrics®, as per procedure outlined next.

6.4.3. Procedure

The study comprised of an online survey via Qualtrics®, which was conducted in two waves of data collection following ethical approval. For the first wave, the Qualtrics® link was shared via the researcher's LinkedIn® page (see Appendix L) to recruit participants due to this platform being widely associated with professionals (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). Participants self-selected based on a request for women with and without children who are currently in some form of paid employment, affiliated with or working for any organisation in the United Kingdom. Emails were also sent to

contacts of the researcher, which included professional contacts who were asked to pass the survey on to their network and regular reminders were sent to the social media sites to adopt a snowballing approach (Atkinson & Flint, 2004). This initial trawl of potential participants indicated a low response rate (Collis & Hussey, 2013) and therefore in discussion with the supervision team, the researcher undertook a second trawl which involved utilising the resource of Prolific, described as a tool for 'on-demand, self-service data collection' which helps researchers to 'recruit high quality research participants to take part in [a] study, survey or experiment' (prolific.co), which resulted in a further 319 participants.

A nominal amount of compensation was offered to participants for the time spent completing the questionnaires, a popular way to increase response rates which has been utilised in similar research (Correll et al, 2007, Berdahl & Moon, 2013). The rate was offered directly by prolific, in line with their standard guidelines for the purposes of research (www.prolific.co) [22.11.19] not negotiated by the researcher. The rationale for this was that the content of the study was considered low risk in terms of influence by incentives, as the participants were being asked for data which would be difficult to exaggerate or inflate in any way related to the incentives.

Participants on prolific are pre-screened by the system to meet inclusion criteria for participation (in this case a female working population, aged over 18, and UK-based, to mirror the first wave). Following pre-screening, participants were offered a textual description of the study before deciding to take part. Completed responses require approval by the researcher within a specified time-period before payment is approved, allowing additional checks on legitimate participation. At this stage, responses with at least 50% completion were approved to compensate fairly for time spent. However only responses with full data were included in final analysis. Confidentiality of data and anonymity of the responses was assured, and IP addresses were not collected in line with guidelines for internet mediated research from the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2017). All participants were treated in accordance with University and APA ethical guidelines including with informed consent obtained prior to participation.

All participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form (see Appendix M & N) – participants were asked for agreement to participate in the online survey. Through these documents participants were informed about the general nature of the study, in order to provide sufficient general information, an ethical way to conduct research (Collis & Hussey, 2013). To this end, all participants were informed that the title of the study was ‘Exploring career self-efficacy and employability of working women’ and that the purpose was to gain the ‘perspective of working women in relation to how confident they feel in using the skills they have in their roles, in their decisions and in their workplace, as well as how employable they feel.’ Finally, the study aim was presented simply as ‘to further our understanding of the unique path of women’s careers today’.

As with the qualitative interviews, the voluntary nature of participation in the research was outlined, via Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent documentation (Collis & Hussey, 2013). This covered the process of withdrawal for participants should they wish to withdraw at any stage from the research. This information also informed participants of the process of data protection including details of anonymity to explain that participants would not be identified, to further encourage open responses (Collis & Hussey, 2013). Finally, participants received a debrief sheet to share further information about the nature of the research, following participation, and contact details again for follow up, if required (Appendix O).

6.4.4. Data Analysis

Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, including linearity and homoscedasticity (Bishara et al., 2021). Next, statistical tests were conducted on the data including t-tests, Pearson’s chi-square tests and correlations to investigate and establish group differences or significant relationships between individual factors and predictor and outcome variables. Next, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) techniques were used to look at the relationships between general and career self-efficacy, employability, and career success. SEM allowed modelling of variables as latent, particularly useful when variables are not directly

observable and are derived from self-report questionnaires, as in this case (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013). In addition, using SEM enabled accounting for measurement error for each of the different instruments used. Within the structural model, the latent variable of GSE was formed from the 10 items on the GSE scale, of CSE made up of the 6 items, and employability formed from all 11 items on the self-perceived employability scale. Finally, three items form the objective career success created a latent variable. After accounting for measurement error of instruments, a two-step process was applied to test the proposed theoretical model (see Figure 6). First for the whole sample, which consisted of a measurement and a structural phase. The measurement model ensured the quality of the measures being used, reducing the possibility of a poor model fit due to an earlier misspecification. In the structural phase, the fit of the hypothesized theoretical model (Figure 6) was tested and compared with the measurement model from step 1. To compare, a chi-square difference test is carried out for both models, and results are accepted if the modified model is statistically superior to the original model (Schreiber et al., 2006).

Next, group differences were tested between women with and without children. This 'multigroup' SEM analysis investigated differences in path coefficients between the groups, which consisted of examining model fit for each group separately and then simultaneously with parameters constrained as equal. If the constraints did not affect the model fit, this indicated that there were no significant differences between the two groups in terms of the path coefficients (i.e., no moderation). However, if the modification indices in the output suggested that releasing the path (or paths) would significantly improve model fit, this meant that the two groups had significantly different coefficients for that path indicating a group moderation effect regarding that path (Kim & Epstein, 2021). Finally, responses to open ended questions regarding supportive and unsupportive factors were analysed using content analysis effectively to organise and group codes into meaningful clusters (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1279). Data were coded and categorised by the researcher and the PhD supervisor independently corroborated the coding and categories through a sampling approach of 10%, as recommended by Lombard (2004). See Appendix P for extracts from qualitative analysis which includes examples of unsupportive factors for women with children

(P1), without children (P2), supportive factors for women with children (P3), without children (P4). Frequency of coded categories was recorded (Birtwell et al., 2018). Additional examples of analysis include excerpts from themes 'supportive factors' 'unsupportive factors (mothers) for meaning/interest and work-family balance' themes. (P5 & P6).

6.5. Results

6.5.1. Preliminary analysis

Prior to conducting analyses, data was cleaned for missing values and inaccuracies or errors. Corrections were made in certain cases, for example where questions were deliberately open, to make sense of them for data analysis purposes and to categorise into groups (e.g., age and location). Participants expressed their age as a number which was subsequently converted into age group for analysis, in 6 increments starting at '18-25' through to '65 and over'. The question on location asked participants 'in what country are you living and working', where responses included United Kingdom, individual country such as England, Wales or in some cases, their city. These were all checked and categorised as United Kingdom, as final numbers were deemed insufficient to compare across countries. In addition, participants were asked 'how long have you worked in your current organisation (__years __months)' which required responses to be further categorised in regular steps using a 7-point scale from 'less than one year' through to 'over 20 years' (see Table 1 for all sub-categories). No other corrections were made to the data. To conclude, responses with missing values were removed which is essential to prepare the dataset for structural equation modelling. A total of 428 answers with full and effective answers to all items on variables for the SEM model were included in the final analysis.

6.5.2. Statistical Analysis (Relationships and differences between variables and between groups)

6.5.2.1. Differences between groups

Differences between groups were established using t-tests and chi-squared tests of difference. The difference in age between women with children ($\mu = 41$; $SD = 8.731$) and women without children ($\mu = 29.47$; $SD = 10.121$) was significant ($t(426) = -12.644$; $p < .001$). Women with children were found to be more significantly represented in the older age groups. A chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the frequency of women with and without children within the demographic categories listed in Table 8. Results showed significance in terms of role, salary and tenure as follows: role, $\chi^2(5, N = 428) = 16.231$, $p < .01$, salary, $\chi^2(11, N = 428) = 53.687$, $p < .001$, and tenure, $\chi^2(6, N = 428) = 53.974$, $p < .001$. Women with children were more highly represented in senior roles, with higher tenures and higher salaries. Next, positive relationships between the variables were tested; general and career self-efficacy (Hypothesis 1), career self-efficacy and employability (Hypothesis 2), and employability and objective career success (Hypothesis 3).

The means, standard deviations and inter-correlations for predictor and outcome variables are presented, for all participants combined (see Table 10), and for each of the two groups (see Table 11). Correlations between general and career self-efficacy, employability and objective career success were significant for all participants.

Table 10.

Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlations for overall predictor and outcome variables scores, for all participants (N=428)

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	GSE	CSE	Emp
GSE	30.65	4.83			
CSE	28.16	4.73	0.58**		
Emp	39.48	7.01	0.42**	0.49**	
OCS	1.64	1.13	0.28**	0.27**	0.203**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In Table 11, results for women with children indicated significant correlations for GSE in relation to age, $r(220) = .21, p < .01$, and for CSE in relation to age, $r(220) = .19, p < .01$. Also strongly correlated was CSE in relation to salary, $r(220) = .33, p < .01$ for women with children. Tenure was significantly related to results for objective career success, $r(220) = .22, p < .01$, as was salary $r(220) = .39, p < .01$. Again, for those without children, age correlated significantly with objective career success $r(204) = .14, p < .05$. For women with children, both GSE ($r(220) = .33, p < .01$) and CSE ($r(220) = .24, p < .01$) were positively related to salary. For women without children the GSE score alone was positively related to salary ($r(204) = .23, p < .01$). Finally, results demonstrated a positive relationship for both groups between OCS and role.

Table 11.

Correlations for predictor and outcome variables with age, tenure, and salary for women with children (n=222) and with no children (n=206)

	Age		Tenure		Salary		Role	
	with children	no children	with children	no children	with children	no children	with children	no children
GSE	0.213**	<i>0.095</i>	<i>0.06</i>	<i>0.79</i>	0.33**	0.23**	<i>0.09</i>	<i>0.03</i>
CSE	0.188**	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.03</i>	0.17*	0.24**	<i>0.06</i>	<i>0.02</i>	<i>0.09</i>
Emp	<i>-0.063</i>	<i>-0.066</i>	<i>-0.07</i>	<i>0.01</i>	<i>0.08</i>	<i>0.12</i>	<i>-0.02</i>	<i>0.01</i>
OCS	0.376**	0.137*	0.22**	0.40**	0.39**	0.33**	0.38**	0.15*

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Bold and italics not significant

Next, the relationships between variables and demographic information were tested, and those with significant results are presented in Table 12. For both groups (women with and without children) correlations between general and career self-efficacy, employability and objective career success were significant.

Table 12.

Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlations for overall predictor and outcome variables scores, below the diagonal for women with no children (n=206), above the diagonal for women with children (n=222)

	Mean (SD) no children	GSE	CSE	Emp	OCS	Mean (SD) with children
GSE	29.73 (4.84)		0.641**	0.381**	0.292**	31.50 (4.67)
CSE	27.27 (5.18)	0.514**		0.589**	0.247**	28.99 (4.10)
Emp	39.01 (6.57)	0.451**	0.398**		0.186**	39.91 (7.39)
OCS	1.34 (1.11)	0.197**	0.237**	0.204**		1.91 (1.08)

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

6.5.2.2. Testing Hypothesis 4. Participants with children will have lower levels of general and career self-efficacy, career success and self-perceived employability than women without children.

To investigate the next hypothesis, responses for the variables of GSE, CSE and OCS were tested exploring differences between groups. Results showed a significant difference in GSE between women without children ($\mu = 29.728$, $SD = 4.843$) and with children ($\mu = 31.5$, $SD = 4.670$); $t(426)=-3.853$, $p < .001$. A significant difference was found in the scores for CSE for women without children ($\mu = 27.2718$, $SD = 5.185$) and with children ($\mu = 28.991$, $SD = 4.098$); $t(390.012) = -3.786$, $p < .001$. A significant difference was found for OCS between women without children ($\mu = 1.345$, $SD = 1.114$) and women with children ($\mu = 1.905$, $SD = 1.078$); $t(426)=-5.290$, $p < .001$. As evident from the scores for each of the above, women with children scored more highly on each of GSE, CSE and OCS.

The next stage was to look at the responses for employability between groups and found no significant difference between groups on self-perceived employability. To further explore the data, the employability scale with internal and external employability were examined separated out. This was based on an existing sub-scale of internal employability (items 1, 2, 3, 7) and external employability (items 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11) making up the overall measure. The reason for this was to understand if there were any potential differences for these sub-scales which may be relevant. Results show that on the sub-scales of internal and external employability there was a significant difference in internal employability for women without children ($\mu = 13.524$, $SD = 3.092$) and women with children ($\mu = 14.500$, $SD = 3.056$); $t(426)=-3.282$, $p=.001$), showing women with

children reported higher internal employability in comparison to the women without children. No significant difference was found on external employability for women without children ($\mu = 25.490$, $SD = 4.772$) and women with children ($\mu = 25.405$, $SD = 5.334$); $t(426) = .173$, $p = .863$).

Overall, the analysis showed women with children reported higher levels of general and career self-efficacy, and objective career success, and no significant difference for overall employability, which does not support Hypothesis 4.

6.5.3. Modelling (SEM) Measurement Phase

To account for measurement error for each of the instruments, structural validity was tested in turn for the three separate instruments general self-efficacy, career self-efficacy and employability. Models were adjusted by setting covariances between error terms that had modification indices (MI) equal or above 20 (Atitsogbe et al., 2019). The models were improved by setting covariances between error terms (see Table 5 for all fit indices and numbers of covariance links). The indicator residuals were considered reasonable modifications due to similarity between the question items. Correlation of error covariance between indicators in the same latent variables improved model fit on all three measures.

Table 13.

Fit indices and numbers of covariance links between error terms

Instrument	Model	Fit indices				Covariances linked to error terms
		<i>Chi squared (X^2)</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	
General Self-Efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995)	Initial	226.018	35	0.905	0.113	0
	Improved	66.797	32	0.983	0.50	6
Career Self-Efficacy (Rigotti et al., 2008)	Initial	87.254	9	0.944	0.143	0
	Improved	33.773	8	0.981	0.087	1
Employability (Rothwell & Arnold, 2005)	Initial	549.040	44	0.710	0.164	0
	Improved	187.606	39	0.915	0.094	3

Abbreviations: CFI, comparative fit index. RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.

In line with the methodology, an initial measurement model was applied allowing all latent variables allowed to co-vary. Results are shown in Table 13.

The theoretical or hypothesised model (model H1) proposed that GSE and CSE both positively link to employability, which in turn links to OCS, indicating employability is mediating between both

forms of self-efficacy and career success. The fit statistics for this hypothesised model show a good fit to the data (RMSEA = 0.51, CFI = 0.926) also SRMR = 0.068, where less than .08 is generally considered a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). See Table 14 for full results.

Table 14.

Fit statistics for the measurement and structural (hypothesised) models for total population

Model	χ^2	CMIN/DF	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (CI)
Measurement model	$\chi^2 (389)=801.246, p<.001$	2.060	0.930	0.922	0.050 (0.045, 0.055)
Structural model	$\chi^2 (391)=826.177, p<.001$	2.113	0.926	0.918	0.051 (0.046, 0.056)

Abbreviations: TLI, Tucker Lewis index

Figure 7 shows results of Structural model for all participants, showing standardised path coefficients of structural models for all women (with and without children).

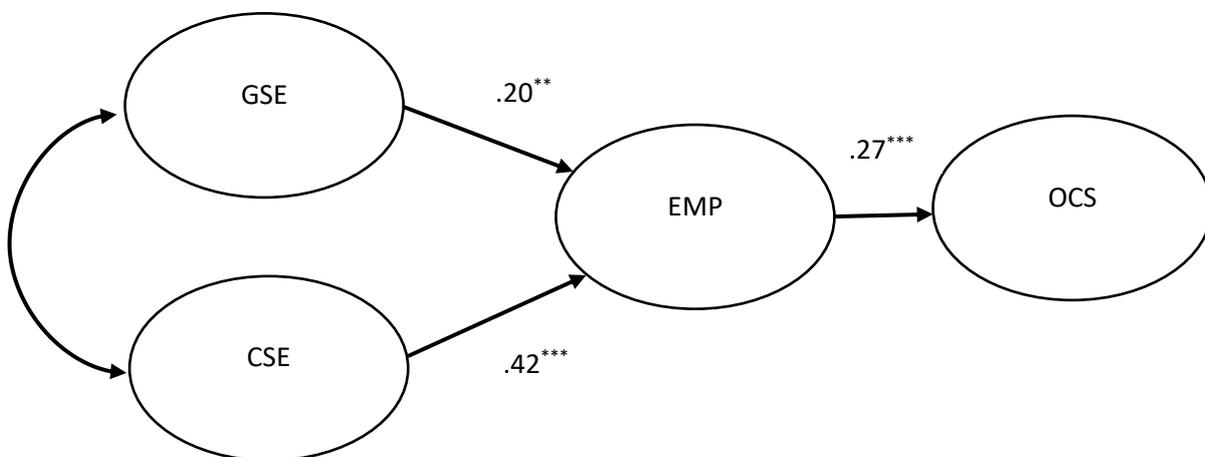


Figure 7.

Final structural model for all participants. Only significant paths are presented ($p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$).*

Further analysis of data show that for this hypothesised model for all respondents (Figure 7), the path of CSE to employability ($\beta = 0.42, p < .001$) was significant and from employability to objective career success ($\beta = 0.27, p < .001$) was significant. The path from GSE to Employability

was also significant at 0.01 level ($\beta = 0.20, p < .01$). Results suggest that for the full population, employability could be mediating between both general and career self-efficacy and objective career success. There could be a stronger link between career self-efficacy and objective career success which makes sense as the concepts of CSE and employability are closely aligned, due to their occupational contexts. This model was accepted as a good fit.

6.5.4. Modelling (SEM) Group comparison

According to Hypothesis 6, the role of employability as mediator between self-efficacy and OCS will be less strong for women with children, due to the potential impact of family demands on careers of women with children. In terms of model fit, this would suggest a difference between groups, with a lower direct effect between SE, employability, and OCS for the women with children. In line with this hypothesis, the above structural model was tested for both groups, first separately and then simultaneously, in line with the multigroup SEM approach. Results are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15.

SEM analysis and fit statistics for structural (hypothesised) model by group, separate and combined (multigroup models)

Model	χ^2	CMIN/DF	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (CI)
A. Original Structural model for Group (WithChild)	$\chi^2 (391) = 692.349, p < .001$	1.771	0.907	0.897	0.059 (0.052, 0.066)
B. Original Structural model for Group (NoChild)	$\chi^2 (391) = 627.082, p < .001$	1.604	0.913	0.903	0.054 (0.046, 0.062)
C. Original Structural model for Group (combined)	$\chi^2 (780) = 1351.083, p < .001$	1.670	0.909	0.899	0.040 (0.036, 0.044)

Figures 8 & 9 show results of group structural models including standardised path coefficients for both groups in a separate and combined analysis.

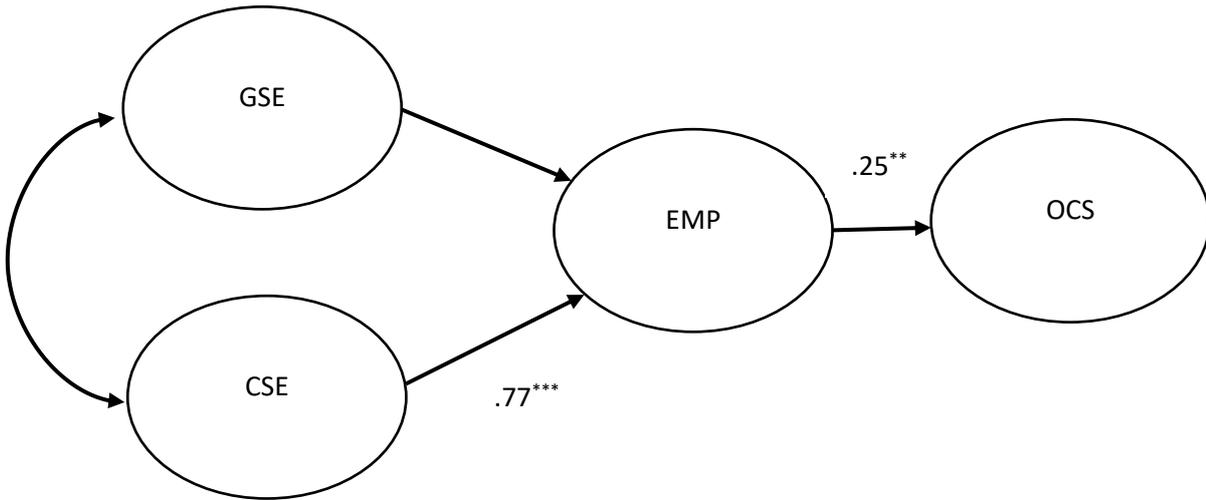


Figure 8.

Structural (group) model for women with children (A). Only significant paths are presented (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$).

th of

CSE to employability ($\beta = 0.77$, $p < .001$) was significant and from employability to objective career success ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < .01$) was significant. The path from GSE to Employability was not significant ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = .261$).

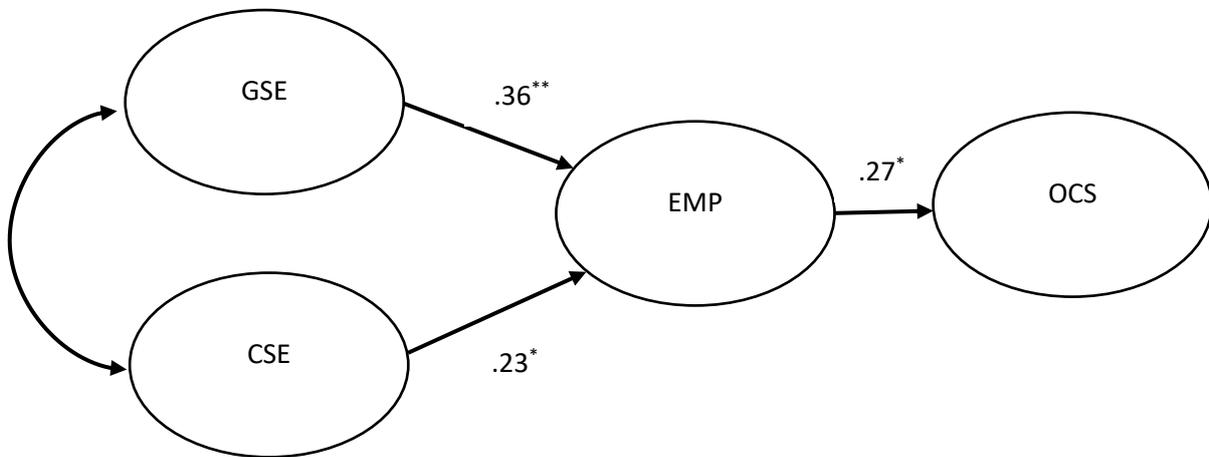


Figure 9.

Structural (group) model for women without children (B). Only significant paths are presented (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$).

Further analysis of data show that for this hypothesised model for women without children, the path of CSE to employability ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < .05$) was significant and from employability to objective

career success ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < .05$) was significant. The path from GSE to Employability was also significant ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < .01$).

Next, to check for group differences between groups for the proposed model, chi-square difference test was conducted, where freely estimated two models except constraining one path to be equal across groups. Chi-square was significant between groups (women with and without children) for paths GSE to employability and CSE to employability (see table 16) and not significant for employability to OCS.

Table 16.

Differences between unconstrained and constrained paths for hypothesised model between groups

Path	Unconstrained model		Constrained model		Difference			Significance
	<i>cmin</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Cmin</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Cmin</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>p-value</i>	
GSE to Emp	1328.514	783	1319.428	782	9.087	1	0.003	p<.01
CSE to Emp	1319.428	782	1335.629	783	16.201	1	0.000	p<.001
Emp to OCS	1319.428	782	1319.987	783	.560	1	0.454	ns

6.5.5. Age as variable in SEM

Additional analysis of group model was conducted, introducing age as a variable. This was outside of the original hypotheses however was considered due to the observed differences between groups relating to age profile of respondents. Results of analysis including fit statistics is displayed in Table 17.

Table 17.

SEM analysis and fit statistics for structural model by group including age

Model	X^2	<i>CMIN/DF</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>RMSEA (CI)</i>
D. Structural model for Group incl Age (WithChild)	$X^2 (417) = 722.408$, p<.001	1.732	0.906	0.895	0.058 (0.050- 0.065)
E. Structural model for Group incl Age (NoChild)	$X^2 (417) = 681.573$, p<.001	1.634	0.905	0.894	0.056 (0.048- 0.063)
F. Structural model for Group incl Age (combined)	$X^2 (834) = 1401.865$, p<.001	1.681	0.906	0.895	0.040 (0.0370- 0.044)

To check for group differences between the model with regards to Age using path analysis, chi-square difference test was conducted where freely estimated two models except constraining one path to be equal across groups. Results showed chi-square was significant between groups for paths Age and employability, Age and OCS (see table 18) and not for Age and CSE or GSE. This showed paths between Age and GSE, Age and CSE were significantly different when compared between groups.

Table 18.

Differences between unconstrained and constrained paths for structural model including Age, between groups (with and without children)

Path	Unconstrained model		Constrained model		Difference			Significance
	<i>Cmin</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Cmin</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Cmin</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>p-value</i>	
Age & Emp	1405.917	835	1401.865	834	4.052	1	0.044	p<.05
Age & OCS	1408.762	835	1401.865	834	6.897	1	0.009	p<.01
Age & CSE	1402.419	835	1401.865	834	0.554	1	0.457	Ns
Age & GSE	1402.615	835	1401.865	834	0.750	1	0.386	Ns

6.5.6. Final model

The model fit was sufficient throughout the process (final structural model fit with equality constraints: SRMR =0.070; CFI = 0.910; RMSEA = 0.040, (0.036, 0.044)). Based on the structural analysis therefore, hypothesis 5, employability mediated the relationship between general and career self-efficacy and objective career success, was supported by the data for our total sample of working women in the UK.

Also hypothesised was that the mediation effect of employability between self-efficacy and career success will be less strong for women with children (Hypothesis 6), something which was not specifically supported by the data. However, the multigroup model did show significant differences between the two groups in terms of the model fit. The data showed that the mediation model fits the women without children better than the women with children. For the women with children, the pathway of career self-efficacy to employability to objective career success was a better fit.

6.5.7. Qualitative results: Supportive and unsupportive factors

Participants responded to one open-text question at the end of the survey which asked; “what factors have you found to be supportive or unsupportive to your participation in the workplace?”. This provided the opportunity for additional qualitative data to supplement quantitative results and provide more depth to the study, including recognising potential factors which may influence self-efficacy and employability. The responses are represented in the figures 10 & 11, showing the overlap between groups and the specific themes more unique to the individual groups, results of which are expanded next.

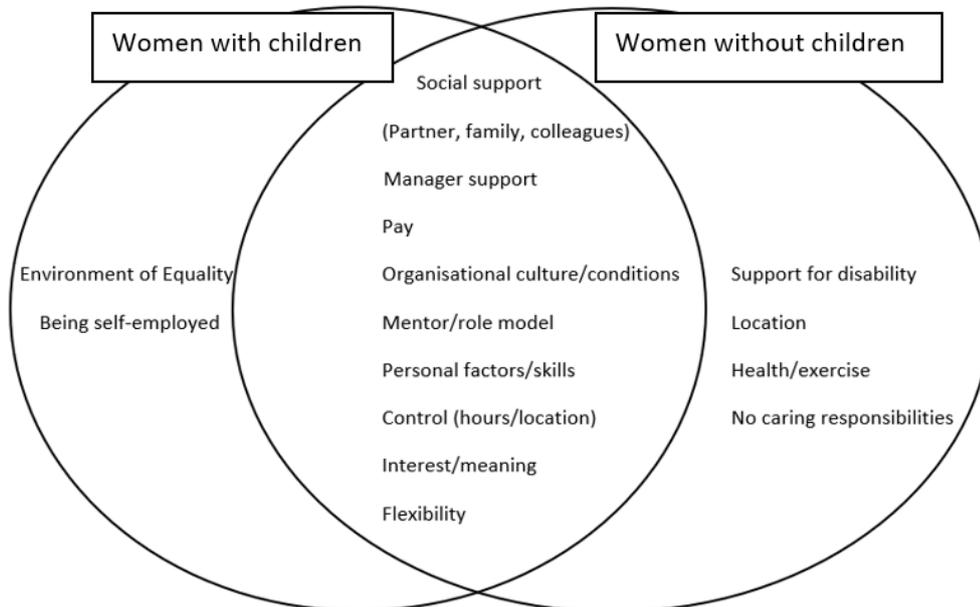


Figure 10.

Supportive factors identified by both groups.

6.5.7.1. Supportive factors

For both groups, many of the same supportive factors were cited, as visible in figure 10 where the middle section displays the similarities across both groups. The areas of similarity for both women with and without children included support from people, examples mentioned including managers, family members, partners, colleagues, and friends. Whilst mentioned by both, support from a mentor or coach was mentioned more often for women with children compared to women without

children. Autonomy was also cited as a supportive factor more commonly for women with children although both groups benefited from control over working hours and location, for women with children autonomy was specifically cited as a supportive factor as it included “choice of work emphasis” (P248), and “accountability and plan days to suit me” (P387) as well as “total control over where and when I work” (P383). For those with children, interest and meaning from their work was a supportive factor for them, something not mentioned as often by women without children, with examples including “doing challenging work with good variety”, “doing purposeful work” (P422), and “interesting work” (P503). The presence of a supportive working environment or culture was also stronger for women with children. Both organisational and cultural factors were mentioned, with some examples including the “company values” (P128) and “working environments where gender bias isn’t obvious” (P222). Equality was clearly important and not being “treat[ed] any differently because I’m a female working in a male dominated industry” (P397). Also mentioned more often for women with children was the importance of what was coded as personal factors, which included qualifications, motivation, and resilience to name a few. Similarly, self-employment was cited several times for women with children, compared to a few cases for women without children. Unsurprisingly, women with children expressed the importance of childcare as a supportive factor. Next, the differences between factors identified as unsupportive were analysed.

6.5.7.2. Unsupportive factors

As with the supportive factors, analysis showed some commonality across the groups, and some areas which differed which is the primary focus here, due to the research focusing on factors impacting working mothers. Figure 11 presents a visual of the differences between group responses, including some key differences which are explored in detail in the following section. Respondents from both groups highlighted challenges with regards to access to flexible working (working time), however this was more common for women with children. Women with children described inflexible working environments with examples provided of working full time hours in part time roles, due to the pressures and lack of support from managers or the organisation. One

mother, offered a full-time role in part-time hours, reported being offered no support by the organisation in terms of how to make it work. She reported feeling that the onus was on her resulting in a decision to work full time as she “didn’t want to fail” (P318). Many of the women with children also reported lack of balance between work and family as an unsupportive factor in their career.

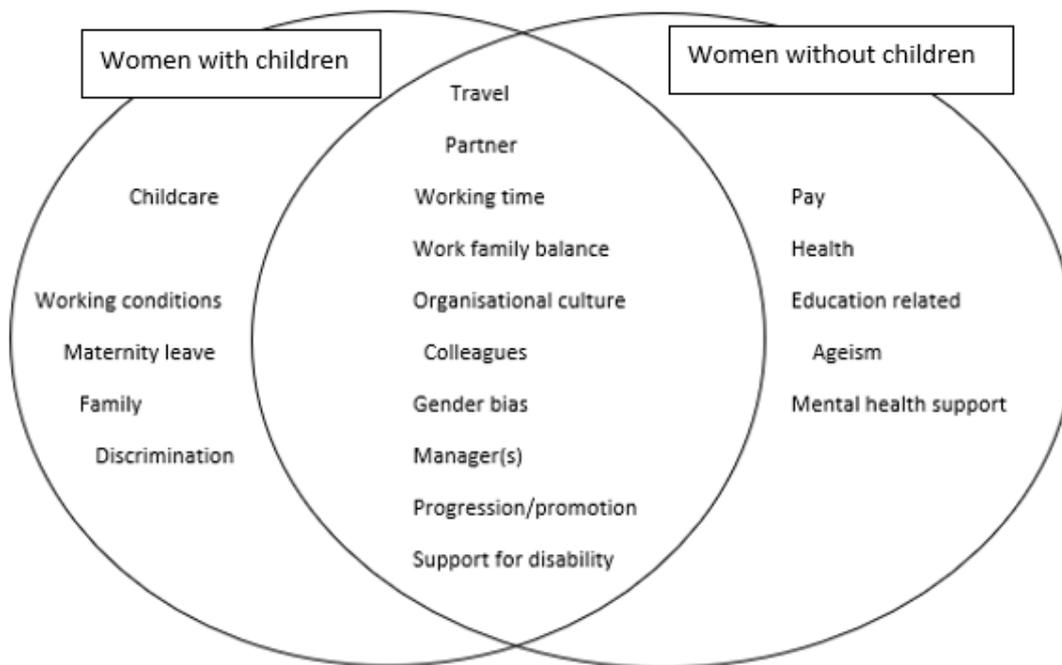


Figure 11.
Unsupportive factors identified by both groups.

Both groups reported some issues with progression and promotion, however in our data it was more commonly cited by women with children. Examples from women with children included poor access to promotion opportunities, being informed progression would not be possible due to part time working or recent career breaks. Some reported putting their own career progression on hold due to their family responsibilities. Related to this issue of career progression was lack of confidence to seek out the roles they might like, again more prevalent in the group of women with children.

6.6. Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the relationships between levels of general and career self-efficacy, employability, and objective career success for working women in the United Kingdom. In addition, the aim was to understand the factors which women found supportive in the workplace for both groups, through the addition of a qualitative open text question. With a background of increasing interest in the boundaryless careers (Sullivan & Arthur, 2005), and responsibility growing for individuals of managing their own careers and highlighting the importance of utilising personal resources (Hirschi, 2012), resources such self-efficacy are influencing perceptions of employability and career success (DeCuyper et al., 2011; Rigotti et al., 2018). Previous research suggests that the more confident people feel in their ability to use their skills both generally and within their work, the more likely they will be to see themselves as more 'employable' or able to gain and maintain work, resulting in increased career success. It was hypothesised that the relationship between self-efficacy and objective career success would be mediated by self-perceived employability. The current study looked additionally at the potential impact of having children on the above concepts as previous literature on women's careers indicates a background of career penalties for working women with additional barriers for those with children (Abele, 2014), which could relate to self-efficacy and perceptions of employability.

Based on our sample of working women with and without children in the UK, positive relationships were discovered between self-efficacy, employability and career success indicating that self-efficacy, in particular career self-efficacy, is positively related to employability and to objective career success. This was in line with our hypothesis and supports the literature. The study did not find support for the hypothesis predicting lower levels of self-efficacy or employability for women with children compared to those without children, relating to evidence of a motherhood penalty. In our sample, the data showed that on the variables general self-efficacy, career self-efficacy and objective career success, results were higher for women with children compared with those without children. There were some important variations between the two groups which could account for some of these differences. For example, older women were more highly represented in the group

of women with children, as were those with higher tenure, more seniority and higher salary. It could be reasonable to assume that age increases perceptions of self-efficacy, which may have come from the additional experience gained over time, something Bandura terms 'mastery of experience', as succeeding in reaching a goal increases belief in one's ability (Bandura, 2008). These women are also more highly represented in more senior positions and with longer tenure. This may be attributed to higher levels of self-efficacy, but again, could also result in increased levels of self-efficacy. Being in more senior roles, for longer periods of time, may increase one's sense of confidence in using ones' skills. Furthermore, self-efficacy influences the presence of certain coping behaviours when an individual faces challenge and determines how much effort and for how long an individual strives towards a goal (Bandura, 1999). Bandura purported that self-efficacy is self-sustaining; and that if an individual can accomplish goals on their own terms, this will boost their feelings of self-efficacy further. It is possible that women with children have developed or reinforced their career self-efficacy because of the challenges faced in reaching to their current position. In relation to differences in self-efficacy for women with children more research would help to identify some of the potential underlying contributing factors.

In terms of employability, no significant differences were found between groups for self-perceived employability. The employability scale was then separated into internal and external employability following the relevant items established by the authors and found that internal employability was significantly higher for women with children. Some research has shown that older employees may have higher internal employability (Tisch, 2014) so these results may be related to the women with children being comparatively older, more senior, with higher tenure. Although other findings suggests that employability may decrease with age particularly in the context of moving job or more seniority (Van der Heijden, 2002). Indeed, overall findings showed no difference in (combined) employability between the groups, with data indicating higher perceptions of employability relating solely to internal employability. As such, these findings could relate to perceived lack of external opportunity, even physical mobility, for women with children, for example the lack of quality flexible working options (Finer-Freedman, 2014). Additionally, women with

children could perceive themselves to be less employable externally in comparison to their higher internal employability. For example, they may question their transferable skills due to barriers, or perceptions of barriers, which exist for women with children when considering working in an organisation unknown to them. This aspect of women's careers is a particularly important one in the context of the boundaryless career, where moving between employers is increasingly commonplace. Women with children may be left behind as a result if they feel less confident in moving between employers and this also ties to the notion that women with children are constrained in their career choices (McRae, 2003). More research is required to explore this link.

The second of our main findings which was hypothesised was the role of employability as a mediator between self-efficacy and objective career success which was established as a good fit for the full group (all women) and within the separate group modelling. It was originally hypothesised that employability would fully mediate the relationship between general and career self-efficacy and objective career success, which was supported by the data. The final accepted model showed that employability does mediate between self-efficacy and objective career success. In the multigroup analysis, differences were observed between the two groups for the paths of general and career self-efficacy to employability. For women without children, the model showed that both general and career self-efficacy were positively related to employability which was positively related to objective career success. For women with children on the other hand, career self-efficacy was significantly positively related to employability whereas general self-efficacy was not. No difference was observed for employability to objective career success between groups.

It was predicted that strong efficacy beliefs in themselves were unlikely to lead directly to career success, but rather that perceptions and actions related to employability would lead self-efficacy to positively impact on career success. The data suggests that this could be the case for all women. In addition, for those with children the role of career self-efficacy appears to be a key contributing factor, over and above general self-efficacy in relation to employability. Once again, as the sample of mothers in this study was largely older with more seniority and tenure, perhaps, the additional

age and experience has resulted in a stronger relationship between career self-efficacy and employability, in the work domain. It is also possible that having children may in some way reinforce this path of domain-specific (in this case career) self-efficacy. It is possible that women with children are drawing more on career self-efficacy in the work domain and general self-efficacy in other domains, additional contexts are not measured here.

In the literature, employability has been identified as an outcome of self-efficacy, however the link between employability as a predictor of objective career success is not as clearly demonstrated. This could be due to employability linking more positively with subjective career success. In one recent study for example, subjective career success was found to partially mediate the relationship between two forms of employability (competence and perceived employability), while objective career success was not found to be related to perceived employability (Bargsted et al., 2021). Indeed, whilst research on career success has been popular for many years, the variability of success measures has been questioned, for example as being overly focused on hierarchical achievement as an indicator (Arnold, 2011). It is possible that in a context of a less bounded career, a more subjective interpretation of career success would be warranted, as opposed to the objective measures, as a more accurate or appropriate measure (Heslin, 2005).

Lastly, the results of the qualitative analysis revealed some interesting insights into the factors which may ease the course of a women's career, with or without children, as well as some obstacles. For example, women with children in the workplace cited the presence of autonomy or control as important supportive factors for them in their work. In addition, they reported that their work provided meaning and interest, which was important to them. This is in line with previous research which highlights the importance of gaining meaning from work (Stockey-Bridge, 2015) as well as how working mothers value autonomy and control in their work to be able to balancing work and family life effectively (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013). For both groups, important factors included the people who support them including colleagues, family, friends, and managers. Again, this reflects results of previous research indicating that support of significant others for example supportive partners (Whittington, 2019) and managers (Whitmarsh et al., 2007) are important for

women with children. Such relational aspect of women's careers and career choices has been highlighted by the research, indicating that relationships are likely to influence and shape women's careers (Breen & Leung, 2020). These themes are also identified by the previous studies, which will be discussed further in the next and final discussion chapter.

The working environment and culture were an important source of support for the women with children, and a lack of flexibility from their organisation was cited as an issue. Unsupportive cultures, for example those with very long working hours, can impede women's careers (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008). Again, echoing the findings from the previous qualitative study. Lack of organisational support has also been shown to lead to increased feelings of marginalisation and being 'pushed out' where mothers subsequently opt out of the workplace as a result (Foley et al., 2018, Breen & Leung, 2020). Moreover, working mothers with positive supervisor support demonstrate increased organisational commitment (Leschyshyn & Minnotte, 2014) and research suggests that supervisor support also has a positive impact on employability (Veld et al., 2015).

6.7. Study strengths and limitations

This study adopted a quantitative approach to further develop understanding of the research question with a relatively large sample of working women, both with and without children. By including the specific psychological constructs of general and career self-efficacy with employability and career success we were able to bring a valuable perspective to these important factors influencing career decisions. Utilising existing research measures with this population also added to the research base on career factors.

The use of an online sample was both a strength and limitation of the study. On the one hand, it produced a diverse sample of working women across the United Kingdom, in terms of industry, roles, and for those who were mothers, of number and age of children. On the other hand, the age range of participants across the two groups showed that women with children were more highly represented in the older age group, in roles with more seniority, in comparison to the women without children who were more likely to be younger, and more highly represented in operational

roles. This could have an impact on the results, something which is highlighted and discussed in detail in relation to the study. Therefore, future research could aim for a more comparable sample in terms of age, tenure and seniority during the research design process and participant recruitment.

Additionally, results may be influenced by any number of factors or concepts not measured here. Firstly, this may relate to the additional demands placed upon for women with children, in contrast to those without children, not directly measured in the study due to existing length of questionnaire as well as risk of rater fatigue, a potential risk associated with all surveys. Any surveys without completed responses were not included in final analysis. Prior research has supported the notion that women with children may face substantial demands on time and resources (Berger, 2018). It is worth noting that demands experienced by women with children vary from person to person, for example, due to factors such as having a supportive partner, and help from family members. There were some indications of this within the qualitative data in the current study, with the supportive and unsupportive factors, although not directly linked to the variables measured. Other factors arising from the themes identified by the current study which could be worthy of future research include timing of motherhood in relation to career level, role-autonomy, and the presence of a mentor or support of managers during return to work. These are explored further within the in-depth qualitative analysis in chapter 4 looking at psychological factors influencing career decisions. Individual differences such as class, race, marital status, were not captured within the current study. During analysis of the qualitative data on supportive and unsupportive factors it became apparent that respondents included women with disabilities. Not part of the original study design, these women's views are not specifically reported, however a review of the comments indicate that women with disabilities also report facing several barriers in the workplace. Therefore, further research looking at individual differences for specific working mothers, such as those with a disability, would lead to additional understanding and support to all working women, over and above a focus on gender or motherhood penalties. Despite its limitations, this study made important contributions to the research in relation to the role of self-efficacy in perceptions of

employability for working mothers, a group which have not been specifically considered in relation to these concepts.

6.8. Conclusion

In sum, this chapter set out to explore the relationship between the psychological factor of self-efficacy on employability and career success for women with and without children, in response to the question 'How do the psychological resources of self-efficacy impact on employability and career success for working women with and without children?'. The context for which is a landscape moving away from the traditional boundaries of roles and organisations (Arthur et al., 2005; Coleman & Thomas, 2017) towards more individualised, self-driven career decisions which rely on the individual's resources (Hirschi, 2012) and skills of employability in realising career opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004). Through a series of hypotheses, the results demonstrated several interesting insights. Self-efficacy and in particular career self-efficacy, is positively related to employability and to objective career success for women with children. However, lower levels of self-efficacy or employability were not found for women with children compared to those without children, not supporting evidence of a penalty for motherhood in relation to these concepts within this sample. Having said this, internal employability was found to be significantly higher for women with children which could relate to some issues for this population in seeking or pursuing external opportunities. In the SEM modelling, employability was found to mediate fully between self-efficacy and objective career success, with differences observed between two groups, with career self-efficacy significantly positively related to employability whereas general self-efficacy was not. Potentially, this could be related to motherhood, somehow reinforcing domain-specific self-efficacy to perceived employability or drawing more on career self-efficacy in the work domain and general self-efficacy in other contexts not measured here. Finally, in the qualitative data, women with children highlighted factors which supported their careers, including factors already highlighted in previous studies within this thesis, such as autonomy, meaning and interest. The working

environment, culture and organisational support was influential, as well as support from others for instance partners and managers.

These interesting insights into the factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers are explored in relation to the rest of the studies in the next and final discussion section.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This concluding chapter will outline the key contribution of the research programme and discuss it in line with existing theory, whilst advancing understanding of the ways in which motherhood influences the career decisions of working mothers. Following this, the chapter will outline the practical applications research limitations, and future research directions.

7.1. Research aims

This PhD programme set out to establish the psychological factors influencing women with children's career decisions using a mixed-methods approach. This research has built on existing understanding in this context, moving past the largely material consequences of the motherhood penalty which has already received much research attention (Bao et al., 2021), and towards a better understanding of the factors influencing women with children's career decisions, which has thus far been neglected in the literature (Noon & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020). This research aimed to progress understanding of the factors influencing the decisions taken by working women with children in their career and thereby inform the decision-making processes (Gross-Spector & Cinamon, 2017). The contemporary career places a particular focus on the individual (Arthur et al., 2005; Biemann et al., 2012) and so focusing on the personal and psychological factors has further developed understanding of the influences on women's career decisions including to remain or leave the workplace, research which has, to date, been disparate (Zimmerman & Clark, 2016).

A mixed-methods approach was used to collect data in line with the overall research question: 'How are women's careers impacted by motherhood, from a psychological perspective?' This began with a synthesis of current research through a systematic review (chapter 4), followed by qualitative research interviews to add a richness and depth (chapter 5), and finally a quantitative survey and modelling approach to highlight factors impacting on working mothers and a comparison of the views of women with children and those without (chapter 6). As outlined in the introduction, the thesis set out to explore the impact of motherhood on women's careers, to

address three issues identified in the literature, firstly, that the current research is fragmented and not sufficiently focused on psychological factors, second that women's own experience is required, and thirdly, recognising the importance of psychological resources to employability and career success in understanding the relevant issues (1.5). The research sought to address these issues and answer the overall research question through the following three questions:

Research question 1: What is known in the literature about the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers?

Here, a systematic review was conducted to review and synthesise research on the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers. The key findings from this study highlighted not only the importance of personal resources but crucially the access to resources, which influenced women's decisions. Both barriers and facilitating factors were presented, including aspects such as self-perceptions, self-resources, and changes over time. The results revealed that women with children are using their own resources to direct their careers, make significant compromises and sacrifices, and some experience insufficient support. Furthermore, the themes highlighted that the women with children in the selected studies were supported through the meaning, challenge and autonomy gained from their work. The results also revealed the sacrifices in these women's career decision making, such as self-limiting success as well as the gendered ideals such as being a 'good mother' which strongly influenced their career decisions.

The research outcomes of the systematic review reinforced the importance for working mothers of maintaining their employability over time, as well as the value of flexibility and adaptability in both an individual and an organisational context. The number of final studies in the review indicated that more research is required which focuses specifically on the factors influencing career decisions of women with children. Finally, this research highlighted the importance of further incorporating the perspectives of working mothers relating to their experience of navigating career decisions over time.

Research question 2: How does motherhood influence the careers of working mothers, from their own perspective?

To build on the systematic review, this second study explored the career decisions of a sample of 20 mothers working in the United Kingdom, in response to the research question ‘How does motherhood influence the careers of working mothers, from their own perspective?’. The results of this qualitative research showed that whilst experience was different for each of the women, it was possible to draw out some common factors which were described as influencing and impacting on career decisions. Using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), these common factors were grouped in to five areas: changing identities, using own resources, support, accessing flexible work and career progress.

The results of this study also emphasised the psychological aspects of balancing work and motherhood. It further emphasised the individualisation of career decisions for working women with children – in other words not driven by the organisation – and that their ability to draw on the resources available to them was increasingly important. This reinforced the value of investigating the relationship between psychological resources of self-efficacy and perceptions of employability for women with children and those without, in achieving career success.

Research question 3: How do the psychological resources of self-efficacy resources impact on employability and career success for working women with and without children?

This final study investigated the perceptions of employability for working mothers and its relationship with confidence in their ability to utilise their resources, specifically self-efficacy. Utilising statistical analysis and structural equation modelling (SEM), the quantitative study sought to understand how self-efficacy affects employability and career success for working women with children compared to peers without children. The research investigated whether employability mediated the relationship between general and career self-efficacy and objective career success. The data also enquired into differences between the two types of self-efficacy, in relation to self-perceived employability for the two groups.

Employability was found to fully mediate between self-efficacy and objective career success, again differences were observed between groups in relation to general and career self-efficacy to employability. For women without children, the model showed that both general and career self-efficacy were positively related to employability which was positively related to objective career success. For women with children on the other hand, career self-efficacy was significantly positively related to employability whereas general self-efficacy was not. It follows that for those with children the role of career self-efficacy appears to be a key contributing factor, over and above general self-efficacy in relation to employability.

Overall findings showed no difference in overall perceptions of employability between the groups, however when considered as separate constructs, women with children reported higher perceptions of internal employability compared to those without children. This may also suggest lower perceptions of external compared to internal employability for women with children. These perceptions could be related to previously identified themes cited by participants in the qualitative research (chapter 5) including lower levels of confidence in seeking opportunities, a perceived lack of suitable external opportunities, and perceptions around access to quality flexible working options outside of one's organisation, all of which may impact on employability. This is discussed next, where relationships between themes and studies are considered. Following this, we discuss the key contributions of the research in line with the literature, beginning with addressing the theoretical background to the thesis.

7.2. Exploring the relationships between studies

Taking the key findings from each study, it may be possible to draw out some commonalities and theoretical relationships, represented by themes from each study to evidence the interrelationships between the studies. Some of these have been explored later (7.3) in relation to the theoretical evidence base. However, to further explain these findings a visual representation was also created to explain and illustrate these factors holistically (Figure 12). Whilst not empirically tested, these visualised relationships between themes provide an opportunity to make sense of the key

contributions in relation to one another, and demonstrate the understanding achieved in relation to the thesis research question: 'How are women's careers impacted by motherhood, from a psychological perspective?'



Figure 12.

Themes from three studies including connections and commonality between themes to address the question 'How are women's careers impacted by motherhood, from a psychological perspective?'

Figure 12 demonstrates that there are links between the themes for example between studies one and two (see 7.2.1. for more on this) and it also explores the links between these themes to the psychological resources of self-efficacy and career success which have been demonstrated by the literature. Figure 12 incorporates a visual representation of the interrelationship between the themes identified in the systematic review (study 1) the qualitative interviews (study 2), and the quantitative modelling (study 3), demonstrating commonality and links between study findings.

7.2.1. The key study themes

Whilst this theoretical figure appears complex, it demonstrates some clear commonalities across the three research studies as described, from a more holistic perspective. The theme of changing identities from the qualitative interviews (study 2) is also reflected in the ideals and the changes over time theme from the systematic review (study 3), represented by the orange lines in the figure. The theme of using own resources (study 2) also reflects the three themes of self/resources, meaning and feelings (study 1) represented by the black lines. Accessing flexible work (study 2) is represented by the green line and links to the theme of autonomy (study 1) and career progress (study 2) links with themes of choice, family needs and sacrifices (study 1) as seen in the blue lines. The blue line linking to autonomy represents the relationship between perceptions of level of control i.e., autonomy, and career progression for participants across both studies. Finally, the grey line represents the link between the theme of support found in the interviews with the relational theme from the systematic review of the literature, relationships which will be expanded next.

7.2.1. Interactions between study themes

In addition to the commonality of themes, there are some possible interactions between findings from studies 1 & 2 and the concepts and findings from study 3, concerning the psychological resources of self-efficacy in relation to employability and career success for women with and without children. Each of the themes identified by the qualitative interviews (changing identities, using own resources, support, accessing flexible work and career progress, see 5.3.1) are

psychological factors which the findings propose are influencing women with children's careers. It is possible that these psychological factors may also influence an individual's career self-efficacy either positive or negatively, as evidenced by the interview findings and discussions, for example the impact of motherhood on levels of confidence and utilising resources in making career decisions (see section 5.6). Three of these qualitative themes (changing identities, using own resources and support) may also influence the non-domain specific general self-efficacy, evidenced through the interviews as these factors related to general confidence such as women reinforcing their identity as a mother and not 'only' as a worker. Confidence can be influenced by expectations around gendered roles, which impacts on career decisions for example relating to leadership progression (Bordalo et al., 2019; Hartman & Barber, 2019).

The challenges associated with the experience of mothering, work, and the subsequent role tensions were highlighted as influencing positive and negative feelings experienced with work and home (study 1) and impacting on wellbeing (study 2), both of which could impact on general self-efficacy, seen in relation to the interaction with confidence around decision making in workplace. In addition, women spoke of the value of support from their partner or family members to their sense of selves, again potentially connecting to their general sense of self-efficacy. Finally, the darker orange arrow in the model for study 3 in Figure 12 represents the stronger emphasis of career self-efficacy to employability for women with children, when compared to those without found in research study 3.

As well as developing career self-efficacy, it would be reasonable to assume that career progress (or lack thereof) could support employability and career success. Employability skills or behaviours may also be reinforced or further developed in relation to career progress, thus the access to career progress would be influential to both concepts. Again, whilst not an analytical model, the visual representation of Figure 12 demonstrates the possible relationships between the themes and concepts explored in this thesis and as the research has done, explains ways in which motherhood may be influencing career decisions, and career progress for women with children. It could also provide some evidence to highlight the specific areas of influence in terms of developing

confidence in using their resources and employability for women with children. These concepts have also been outlined in detail in the context of the theory, see sections 7.3.1, 7.3.2 and 7.3.3. Some of the key findings of the research and relationships between themes has been visually represented (Figure 12) as well as synthesised in section 7.2. Building on this are the theoretical considerations of the study findings, presented forthwith.

7.3. Theoretical considerations

In this section, the results of the three studies are discussed with reference to career theory, including career resources (Hirschi, 2012) and employability (DeCuyper et al., 2011; Forrier et al., 2018, Van der Heijde, 2014) as outlined in chapters 1 and 2, important areas of research in this field in relation to women with children's career decisions. Finally, we relate the findings to career transitions (Greenberg et al., 2016; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008), choices (Hakim, 2002; McRae, 2003; Young, 2018) and the motherhood penalty (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia, 2020). These issues have related directly to the three studies, with the themes identified from the systematic review, qualitative interviews and survey analysis adding to and revealing more about each of these theories, explored now.

7.3.1. Career theory

Within the introductory chapters of this thesis, the context within which careers have developed over recent years was explored, revealing the emergence of a more flexible, less bounded career, one which enables more personal control (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), where responsibility lies with the individual (Hall, 2002; Hirschi, 2012) and driven by flexibility (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008). With individuals relying to a lesser extent on their organisation for the development of their career and more on their own resources (Forrier et al. 2018), the boundaryless career approach is a potentially useful lens to view the careers of women, due to the perceived lack of structure and rigidity (Lewis et al., 2015). Organisations have also progressed over recent decades towards a more flexible, adaptable approach in response to the changing context, although the support 'on

the ground' may not be sufficient for effective negotiation of the work/family interface (van Breeschoten & Evertsson, 2019) and may be responsible for women leaving the workplace or reducing their participation (Andersen, 2018). The more traditional model of careers as a linear structure is no longer appropriate, and has not been for some time, and the contemporary career needs to recognise the variation between the genders (Tomlinson et al., 2018) and even between individuals, or risk disadvantaging more and more employees.

7.3.1.1. Career resources

One model of career theory has brought together a number of concepts from the self-directed career literature including career adaptability, employability, career motivation and the protean and boundaryless career orientation, titled the 'critical resources' framework (Hirschi, 2012). Hirschi's framework also recognises the changes inherent within the career experience with different aspects interacting and reinforcing in a dynamic process occurring. This approach is fitting for the results of the current studies, as the dynamic nature is reflected in the data. For example, within the qualitative interviews (chapter 5), women spoke of the shifts and changes over time, the importance and value of using the resources available to them, including resilience and drive, based on professional roles or expectations of certain career paths ('using own resources' theme). The interviews revealed factors which may be supportive in managing the shifts and changes in priorities when balancing motherhood and careers. The research also indicated that there were certain protective factors which came from the individual themselves, such as recognising their strengths, identifying their motivations, and again meaning gained from work, for some providing the determination to keep going (4.3.4.1; 5.3.1.2). We can see these factors evidenced in the results of studies 1 & 2, but what this PhD also adds is a contextual understanding of their importance to ongoing participation for women with children, and therefore a valuable contribution to the literature to support women with children to remain connected with their career, during different stages of their lives.

Overall, the research has pointed to the value of the critical resources model as a framework for integrating the self-directed career management literature more coherently which provides a

valuable lens for evaluating the factors contributing to career development (Hirschi, 2012). It also highlights the dynamic nature of the concepts, which was demonstrated by the current research with various shifts and changes revealed in the current studies which, alongside changes to identity and fluctuations in confidence or self-efficacy, is reflective of existing research (Ladge & Greenberg, 2015). The interview participants (chapter 5) also sought out meaning from their roles and gained this from engaging with work which indicated that this is an important aspect for them. Some examples showed that employers may attempt to 'simplify' roles or to reduce responsibility to support women to manage their role alongside family (5.3.1.2.). However, this may be reductive for the working mother, and instead organisations could consider other ways to provide support which encourage more engagement and interest in tasks and responsibilities (Alshabani & Soto, 2020). There was an interesting dichotomy exposed within this discovery, that some women sought meaning and challenge from their work, for some to stay committed and engaged, at the very time when this was most difficult for them to do, as seen in the systematic review findings (chapter 4) however this could be facilitated by open communication between employee and employer. There were also some contradictory findings with some women seeking less challenge, reflecting findings from previous research which suggests women may prefer balance over challenge in mid-career (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

The current research has therefore added to the discussion of the value of career resources and has provided further support for a more holistic and dynamic model such as the one proposed by Hirschi (2012) which recognises the interconnections between psychological, social, identity and human capital. The evidence from this research supported all aspects of the model and highlighted the influence of motherhood on these varying resources, which may be reducing women with children's capacity to develop their career successfully. Using this lens has been helpful and could provide a valuable framework to support career development interventions in the future. Additionally, the use of a resources-based model is suited to the shifts and changes identified in the studies (4.3.4.1; 5.3.1.1).

7.3.1.2. Relationships and Support

Also linked to career resources, and following Hirschi's model of critical career resources, the current research supported the notion that certain key individuals including managers are vital for planning and working through career decisions. Indeed, as mentioned previously in this section we demonstrated that the manager played a crucial role for working mothers in their careers, and a relationship which participants described often in both the qualitative question within the quantitative research (chapter 6) and the narrative interviews (chapter 5) from a positive and negative perspective. This reflected existing research which highlights the role of managerial support for retention of women in the workplace (Ladge et al., 2018) with positive attitudes from managers towards parenthood predicting higher occupational balance (Borgh et al., 2018), reduced work-family conflict and increased wellbeing (Muse & Pichler, 2011) regardless of working full- or part-time (van Breeschoten & Evertsson, 2019). The current research supported previous findings and revealed the methods of support which may be particularly beneficial which included demonstrating an understanding of the challenges, having discussions around flexible working options, somewhere to go to discuss changing requirements over time including with the changes to working patterns (see chapters 5 and 6 for more detailed discussion). The presence of positive and supportive organisational policies and practices was also important to research participants, evidenced across all studies.

The job demands-resources (JDR) model proposes that occupational stress results from an employee's imbalance of demands and perception of resources to deal with the demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Management support in the form of "encouragement, sponsorship and resources" is also included in the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards for assisting employers to ease work-related stress (HSE, 2009, p.7). The important role of manager has been well documented in the literature including to support retention (Ladge et al., 2018) and wellbeing (Muse & Pichler, 2011). Additionally, unsupportive management reduces psychological resources of employees (McIlroy et al., 2021).

In the current research, managerial support was also vital in relation to recognising the likelihood of different transitions and changes which may influence women's careers in different ways, rather than planning for one approach which becomes fixed. The most supportive managers exemplified in our research demonstrated an openness of mind in terms of what flexibility looks like for that individual, and an understanding of the challenges faced by individuals, which could come from experience. More commonly, however, this will come from shared understanding of the value of women continuing to engage in their working lives (Laver et al., 2019) in addition to the responsibilities of motherhood (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014). We can now also contribute to the evidence that managerial, or supervisor support is important for working women's careers because they can understand and interpret individual needs, in relation to the relevant organisational policies and procedures such as around flexible working and access to resources as exemplified by the JDR model and the HSE indicator tool. Indeed, positive perceptions around organisational support for balancing work and family benefit all employees, both women and men (Clark et al., 2017). In addition, the current research highlighted how women described the negative impact of not seeing others 'like them' in certain roles, such as positions of power and influence, as well as in certain sectors, often referred to as 'role models' (Hill & Wheat, 2017; Sealy & Singh, 2010; Quimby & De Santis, 2006).

The lack of senior women, particularly in part-time positions, may impact on the visibility of role models (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014; Henley, 2015), highlighted within the current research (chapter 5). Role models may offer opportunities for women to learn through observing examples of positive as well as negative behaviours, which the individual sees and may wish to avoid replicating (Gibson, 2003). This is supported by the current research where negative perceptions of those in positions of authority included poor support, understanding, or contradictory values around managing flexible working for example. Positive examples were also found in the qualitative interviews (chapter 5) as well as the qualitative content analysis in study 3 (chapter 6), for both women with and without children, indicating such requirements could be related to gender, not just confined to women with children. In relation to women with children however, research on the

impact of contradictory values has shown that making decisions which are congruent with value systems will result in higher satisfaction (Powell, & Greenhaus, 2012) and those in contrast can result in hiring discrimination (Aranda & Glick, 2014).

Preferences for female mentors may increase at middle age, where women may express a desire to be mentored by someone with similar experience of balancing home and life, and as female mentors may be more likely to provide psychosocial as well as career support when compared with males (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014). In addition, a benefit of more equity in the home would be improving men's understanding of the challenges with balancing work and home and potentially increasing availability of suitable mentors to meet the needs of mentees. Certainly, participants in the qualitative interviews (chapter 5) valued the support of managers with experience and understanding of managing the additional responsibilities of home, regardless of gender. Our research also supported the previous findings that female managers may miss out on formal and informal learning opportunities due to poor access to mentoring and suitable networks, and ultimately are unaware or not considered for opportunities for advancement compared to male counterparts (Linehan & Scullion, 2008). Although when it comes to promoting role models for women, for example in relation to entrepreneurs, caution has been advised, with research findings suggesting a "potential damaging impact of such campaigns in perpetuating the individualised, entrepreneurial "superwoman" identity" (Byrne et al., 2019, p.180).

On top of support from others being key, women were also relational in their decisions, taking into consideration others' views and recognising the benefit of supporting others for example, in formal or informal networks (Breen & Leung, 2020; Crozier, 1999; O'Neil, et al., 2008). In the interviews, some participants explained the importance of other significant people to their decisions, which for some, made a considerable difference between successful engagement with their careers as well as longer-term sustainability of that career. In addition, the findings suggest that it is important for employees to engage with others who understand their experience which could be allies, networks, or again role models. The results also demonstrated that knowing the 'reality' of working motherhood was invaluable for many and again having others who could understand their situation

helped here. For example, knowing that others also experienced issues and challenges was a comfort or even validation of previous decisions such as to remain in the workplace, adding to the research in this regard (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014; Laver et al., 2019), yet also emphasising the influence of others on women's career decisions.

This research has highlighted the value of social support (Hamilton Volpe et al., 2011) and the impact of others on career decisions including through a relational lens (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014). Organisations have much to benefit from supporting women in reaching positions of seniority, not only in increasing diversity of representation but also encouraging those coming up through the organisation through more visible role models.

7.3.1.3. Self-efficacy

Described as the confidence an individual holds in their ability to carry out certain actions or accomplish goals (Bandura, 1997) self-efficacy is particularly relevant to the boundaryless career orientation where proactive behaviours such as psychological mobility are required (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019). Self-efficacy is a positive predictor of self-initiated change in relation to employability (Schyns et al., 2007), linked to objective career success (Abele & Spurk, 2009) and successful adjustment in employment for working mothers (Houle et al., 2009). It can also be negatively influenced by high demands and emotional strain (Rigotti et al., 2018).

The results of the quantitative analysis (chapter 6) also confirmed a positive relationship between self-efficacy, employability, and career success (after Betz & Hackett, 1997; DeCuyper et al., 2014). Moreover, results showed women with children reported higher levels of general and career self-efficacy (CSE), and objective career success compared with those without. This is not supported by the existing literature which suggested that CSE would be lower for mothers, due to the impact of family responsibilities (Abele, 2014) with previous research indicating that demands on time interfering with personal resources (Berger, 2018; Demerouti, 2012), employability (Berntson et al., 2014) and career success (Ballout, 2008). This points to the importance of developing a more nuanced understanding of the sub context, over and above global knowledge of

concepts such as self-efficacy. However, the representation of predominately older and more senior women with children could be demonstrating Bandura's enhanced 'mastery of experience' (Bandura, 2008) and higher perceptions of employability (Tisch, 2014) which is worthy of further investigation.

Interestingly, career self-efficacy was related more strongly to self-perceived employability for women with children than those without. These results could represent an enhanced sense of domain specific self-efficacy or alternatively could indicate that women with children are drawing less on general self-efficacy in relation to employability or within the career domain (see more on this in section 7.3.2). As the hypothesised full mediation model was a good fit, we suggest that measuring and then developing areas such as self-efficacy and employability for individual women with children is likely to impact positively on career success, indeed existing research has previously proposed this link, although not specifically in working women with children (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013; DeCuyper et al., 2014). Previous research has indicated that domain-specific occupational expertise can increase employability across the life span, although this varies according to age and stage (Van der Heijden, 2002). This research also indicated that supervisors' opinions can be highly influential particularly for the middle and more senior level employees, and the supervisor may need convincing that there are additional opportunities which the employee could benefit from, reinforcing the benefits to the employee, supervisor, and organisation.

7.3.2. *Employability*

As outlined in detail in the literature review (chapter 2), the pattern of reduced boundaries across organisations has emphasised personal responsibility for careers, and the value of self-resources in navigating career decisions (Hirschi, 2012). This personal responsibility also amplifies employability, increasingly relevant throughout the career lifespan (Williams et al., 2015) and thus offers a valuable lens through which to investigate how various life stage factors impact on populations such as working mothers (Arun et al., 2004). Employability research benefits from going beyond the graduate focus to consider age (Van der Heijden et al., 2009) or different

patterns (Peters et al., 2015) and this research represents a novel application of employability to the population of working mothers. Employability, as outlined in chapter 2, is described as an individual's ability to gain, and maintain work (Van der Heijde, 2014) and is important to future career success as perceptions of employability are considered to drive future employment behaviours (DeCuyper et al., 2011). Whilst there is still some lack of agreement in the literature as to where the focus of employability should lie, research has indicated that perceptions are important and that individuals are likely to rely on those perceptions in navigating their careers (Forrier et al., 2018) consequently study 3 (chapter 6) utilised Rothwell and Arnold's perceived employability scale (2005).

The model developed through SEM (chapter 6) investigated the relationship between self-efficacy and employability for women with and without children in the workplace. While results showed no differences in overall employability between groups, when split further into internal and external employability, the former was higher for women with children. These results could indicate that women with children feel more employable within, but not necessarily outside of, their own organisation. This could be related to the ways in which women with children perceive external career opportunities, the opportunity of employment on top of family demands, or other specific challenges they may face in their career. They may also benefit from developing external employability to be more equitable with their internal employability. There has been limited research looking at internal or external employability and the research which does is more concerned with impact of age rather than gender (Tisch, 2015). Research has looked at the impact of personality factors on employability in relation to work family conflict and proposed that developing confident and ambitious attitudes would be beneficial (Wille et al., 2013), language which also has gendered implications. Also, according to Lin et al. (2018) career plateaus, relating to hierarchical or job-content, may breach the psychological contract and negatively affect internal employability. According to our data, working mothers may be experiencing career frustrations or even stagnation but lack the confidence in external employability to seek out opportunities outside of their current employer. Further considering employability security as an alternative to job

security (Bernstrom et al., 2018) fits the boundaryless context and may specifically be a valuable consideration for women with children.

As above, whilst no differences were found in relation to overall employability between groups, the women with children had higher levels of internal employability than those without. This suggests that women with children have higher confidence in their own roles or organisations and yet lower external employability, and within the qualitative interviews (chapter 5), factors relating to external employability were identified such as in the theme of moving organisation (5.3.1.5), with examples including feeling stuck, concerns about maintaining flexibility in a new organisation or the possibility of requiring maternity leave in a new organisation. In addition, the interviews also identified that confidence in seeking employment was low at different times in their lives for working mothers, which was very impactful on their career experiences and on their decisions following children. This impact was pervasive for some and influenced the type of organisation, as well as role they sought out, and stayed with even as children grew older. For some these issues were even more relevant as their children grew, as the impact of school, extra-curricular activities and psychological support became increasingly relevant. The evidence showed that certain sectors were considered more attractive to women with children, including those with more explicit flexible working policies, as well as self-employment, something which the systematic review also explored. This is a valuable contribution as the research evidence around motherhood is focused predominantly on the period post return to work following maternity leave (Aisenbrey et al., 2009; Gough & Noonan, 2013; Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017). However, there are multiple parental and motherhood transitions which occur, suggesting that targeted support is required to enable women to continue to engage in the workplace at a level equal to men and women without children, according to their choices.

The results of the qualitative interviews (chapter 5) demonstrated evidence of barriers to external employability for women with children, and this has not been fully explored in the literature. The women in the qualitative interviews provided examples of losing confidence in relation to moving roles after having children, and uncertainty around replicating current working arrangements in

other organisations. There were interesting examples here of women working hard to develop their employability, such as evidence of support from a mentor in approaching and negotiating future roles under the required working arrangements. Such accounts demonstrated the hard work and persistence required and, again, the benefit of external support in the form of a mentor. Existing research indicated that women with children can feel constrained due to limited access to quality part-time options (Gash, 2008; Lyonette, 2015) and the evidence from this PhD adds depth to this work. This was particularly the case for the interviewees in seeking positions at a more senior level, and thus could continue to impact later in the career, rather than necessarily at the earlier stages where children are younger. This supports evidence that gender can negatively impact decisions to take on leadership roles (Bordalo et al., 2019; Hartman & Barber, 2019) and reinforcing motherhood penalty at the more senior positions. This evidence shows the value of exploring women's, or primary caregiver's, career decisions across the life course, and during different transition points, and highlights that the outward perception of flexible options may not match the reality of women's experiences. Particularly when it comes to the more senior roles, which may explain some of the disparity in female representation at the most senior levels.

The quantitative study (chapter 6) identified that employability plays a role in mediating the relationship between self-efficacy and career success, with differences between women with and without children in that relationship. This related specifically to career self-efficacy which appears to play a particularly important role for women with children, based on the results of the model comparison in the structural equation modelling. The results of which suggest that there was a stronger relationship for women with children with the 'domain-specific' self-efficacy in relation to employability, compared to those without children. This could be related to the age and stage of the women with children in the sample, representative of longer tenure and more seniority.

Whereas the women without children, the majority of whom were younger with less occupational experience and seniority may be drawing on general and domain-specific self-efficacy in a different way due to their lower age and experience. However, it is also possible that these results could be related to motherhood, whereby domain specific self-efficacy for women with children may be less

directly related to employability compared to more general self-efficacy in the career domain. Whilst there is no evidence that the relationship between domain specific self-efficacy and employability would have a negative impact for women with children, women with children may be drawing more on career self-efficacy in the work domain, and general self-efficacy may be more beneficial in other domains. As outlined in chapter 2, self-efficacy can be impacted negatively through the increase of 'daily hassles', which may reduce women's beliefs in their ability to effect change by reducing these stresses, and thus increasing the likely impact of the stresses (Broadnax, 2016). Therefore, general self-efficacy may be beneficial to support women with children in managing daily stresses and thus developing a clearer understanding of their levels of self-efficacy and the implications for career decisions could be beneficial.

Whilst there remains a level of complexity within the factors influencing women's career decisions, this thesis has identified that psychological factors do impact on employability for women with children and that creating genuine opportunities for progress with flexibility alongside positive support including external mentors, could contribute to the further equity of opportunity for women at all levels of their career.

7.3.3. *Career transitions and identity*

The qualitative interviews (chapter 5) demonstrated the power of the 'good mother narrative' (Stockey-Bridge, 2015), echoed in the results of the systematic review (chapter 4). Previous research has indicated that such schemes of work or family devotion are important to career decisions (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2008; Weisshaar, 2018) and the current research also found evidence of such gendered beliefs, with women describing being conflicted in their division of time between work and family. There was also evidence in the current research that such conflicted views came from others, with women describing how managers, or family members demonstrated such gendered beliefs which were challenging and influenced their decisions also. This supported the research of Hager (2011) who found that such ideals may be influential, even where a mother may not herself ascribe to that belief. The identity shift from working woman to working mother was

an important one (Hodges & Park, 2013), yet there are also further identity shifts which continue long after this such as working mother with child in nursery, working mother of school-aged child, working mother of teenager, something which has not been fully considered in the literature.

The participants described wanting to keep hold of a prior 'work self' even though this resulted in challenges in managing their workload. Following Greenberg et al. (2016) these women were developing a new vision for themselves which influenced their decision making. The qualitative accounts also demonstrated the ambivalence or even vacillation between different perspectives, and again how this changed and shifted over time. Women in the interviews described different times where career came to the fore and other times where this was family. This type of shift in priorities relates to the findings from Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) in their kaleidoscope model (KCM) of careers where they identified the changing nature of authenticity, balance, and challenge. Whilst their research is not ascribed to the ages and changes of children, it could offer a way of viewing how women's careers move and flex through various transitions. Whereas there was evidence that women may seek balance due to family responsibilities, as proposed by the KCM there was also support for increased autonomy, meaning and challenge by participants (studies 1 & 2) suggesting that women with children would value increasing challenge in their role, even at times when stress is high, as within the systematic review their experience of being stretched in their career was reframed as good stress which enabled them to cope with the demands of family life.

For some, professional identity was a source of support during the more challenging times, or when issues with the manager or employer emerged, and the professional identity acted as a form of protection. Indeed, research suggests that individuals with a strong professional identity or 'identity capital' (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2019) also experience enhanced career achievements such as success and satisfaction (Pearson et al., 2012) and it supports goal attainment (Else et al., 2020). Also beneficial to some was holding on to their professional identity and having a clear career course or direction either mapped out for them, such as through their organisation, a professional association (evidenced in the qualitative interviews) or even by themselves, for

example through a specific goal to achieve within certain time periods. Moreover, having the opportunity to identify strengths, motivations and gaining support in maintaining their determination, or resilience, would be helpful, for example through coaching or other developmental opportunities (Brown & Yates, 2018). Values-based decision making can be influential with decisions which are congruent with the individuals value system linked with satisfaction (Powell & Greenhaus, 2012) and so developing an understanding of such values and their relevance to decisions, could provide support to working mothers.

What was also striking were the many reasons why career remained, or even increased in, importance for women with children. This included gaining meaning as seen in the systematic review and staying in touch with their previous selves (Grady & McCarthy, 2008; Jackson & Scharman, 2002; Rushing & Parks, 2017; Stockey-Bridge, 2015; Whittington, 2019). In the qualitative interviews, when considering their career journey – for some a valuable outcome of contributing to this research – women were reflective and at times surprised by the outcome. For some, being a working mother led them to a place they did not expect, although not necessarily unwelcome and some were satisfied with the outcome. This could have been a positive reframing of the situation, or a genuine satisfaction. One interview participant reflected how grateful she was for the fact that she did ‘stick it out’- this was clearly something which she had doubted was possible at different stages. This points to resilience as a valuable resource in the pursuit of career decisions (Rochat et al., 2017). The experience had also left participants with some negative feelings and potentially very difficult experiences which were still impacting on them and their subsequent career decisions (Mangeli et al., 2017). Some of the women revealed how they needed to demonstrate resilience (Lian & Tam, 2014) which included fighting against an individual or organisational system to meet their needs. It appeared that at times, the power was held by the other party with the women’s own career plans and even family potentially impacted as a result. This also demonstrated how the interviews (chapter 5) provided a valuable, and for some surprising, opportunity to reflect – something which could be drawn upon to give a supportive space to women in understanding and exploring their career decisions following motherhood,

echoing previous research where women with children significantly valued being listened to as part of the research interview experience (Noon & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020).

7.3.3. *The motherhood penalty*

The current research revealed that there were specific issues with regards to career progress for working mothers, which impacted negatively on the options and opportunities available to them, in support of recent research evidencing a motherhood penalty beyond pay (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysia, 2020). For many participants, at various times across their career, career options were limited by various factors which included practical considerations such as travel requirements, childcare, as well as the role flexibility and the perceptions of those hiring, across all three studies. The latter also reflected the lack of confidence experienced by some women in negotiating work and family, following a return to work or in negotiating the challenges of seeking new opportunities. The evidence from the qualitative interviews (chapter 5) for example, showed that some women lacked confidence and lacked power, and felt unable to challenge certain decisions, or to negotiate the right conditions within their own roles and when looking for new ones. This was particularly apparent in the move into more senior positions, where the lack of options, as mentioned in the previous section (7.3.2), was noted. This could represent a particular barrier for more senior level women with children and again should be of concern to organisations where representation of women in senior leadership positions is low (Madsen et al., 2020). This supports the notion that the concept of employability has not been considered widely enough and should incorporate personal circumstances as well as individual and external factors (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Fuertes et al., 2021). Improving access to flexible working options and improving remote working capability, particularly at the more senior levels, would greatly enhance the opportunities available to women with children and reduce the numbers leaving or reducing participation due to work family interface (Andersen, 2018).

Women with children are lacking opportunities for suitable roles at more senior levels, as well as in relation to more practical issues such as location, and working hours, and access to desired

flexibility. Also related to motherhood penalty was the evidence from the current research of the importance of managerial support for many women across their careers (see also 7.3.1.2), influential to perceptions around mobility. Managers were a strong influence on decisions by providing support as well as through their lack of support. Managers who had some level of experience or empathy with the situation appeared to offer the most support and therefore providing them with support as supervisors of women with children would be beneficial. Research has shown the value of networks to advancing women's careers, as with many organisational interventions, communicating intended purpose and anticipated outcomes to leaders is vital to success (O'Neil et al., 2011). Such issues are also indicative of the value of social support to women in the workplace, (O'Neil et al., 2008) and evidenced in our studies as seen earlier.

It was clear from the qualitative interviews (chapter 5) that other factors which are likely to be supportive to those with caring responsibilities include having an organisational culture which encourages people to have open discussions about their needs and includes early planning conversations for approaching maternity leave and returning to work. The participants described seeking access to flexible work and, importantly, of trying or needing to figure that out for themselves or in most cases using an existing pattern, which may or may not work for them. It appeared therefore that having good, working examples of flexible options would have been helpful but was lacking, something described in previous research (Young, 2018) and demonstrates one way in which women are disadvantaged with regards to accessing flexible working (Wheatley, 2016).

Part-time work is strongly linked to female workers (Schmidt, 2021) and to the motherhood penalty (Budig & England, 2001) and the results here suggest that this remains a challenge for women with children as well as those without (chapters 5 & 6) who struggled to access flexible opportunities, both spatial and temporal (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019). The interview findings also suggested that a flexible working culture which demonstrates or encourages many examples of flexible working is beneficial. People with caring responsibilities also benefit from flexible working which does not follow a specific template, such as a compressed week for those wishing to work

full time hours with flexibility, or a three-day week for those wishing to work part-time, but instead one which is tailored to fit both the individual and the organisation. Ensuring the availability of appropriate technology to support working from home as well as an opportunity to work varied hours would be very helpful, including the opportunity to shift and change where and when necessary. The Covid-19 pandemic provided a unique environment within which to study organisational changes such as large-scale remote working with findings suggesting that two to three days representing one 'ideal' ratio although support and cultural practice are required (de Klerk et al., 2021). However, such changes were short-term and 'forced', and not necessarily matched to employee needs or circumstances, and changes to working practices need to have time to mature (Franken et al., 2021). The current research has also illustrated the potential negative impact of a more rigid form of flexibility which is more of a one size fits all approach which fits no one.

Whilst not the focus of the study, pay and seniority were measured as contributors to the objective measures of career success. The research revealed no differences in relation to measures of career success such as pay or seniority, therefore the data did not support a specific motherhood-related pay penalty. The participants with children who took part were comparatively older, with more seniority and longer tenure, in comparison to the women without children, which could have contributed to these results. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those in higher positions with more seniority were more likely to earn more due to the objective rewards from higher positions, and this was not impacted by caring responsibilities.

Previous research on the careers of working mothers has questioned the freedom of choice through which women exercise their career decisions (Hakim, 2002; McRae, 2003; Young, 2018). The extracted studies from the systematic review (chapter 4) revealed that mothers were drawing on their own resources and carving out their careers based on the options they perceive are available to them – a form of 'satisficing' rather than maximising opportunities (Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992). That analysis showed that career decisions were often based on some form of compromise, as the participants re-prioritised aspirations for example, within their current

circumstances. For example, some women sought to integrate their work/life roles as a 'matter of fit' according to their current situation, and others placed their aspirations on hold, also confirmed in the qualitative interviews (chapter 5). Participants reported self-limiting success, in line with previous research (Buzanell et al., 2016) and many decisions were evidentially based on some form of compromise, and re-prioritisation. Finally, the results of the systematic review (chapter 4) highlighted the personal impact, the sacrifices, and the importance of connecting with both career and family in a meaningful way, also evidenced within the qualitative interviews which demonstrated the impact of motherhood on the freedom of choice within individual's career decisions.

In summary, the thesis has highlighted that working women with children were using their own resources to navigate the changes and shifts which occur after having children, requiring different resources and a resilience over time. Self-development and support for these resources would be beneficial. It was also beneficial for some women to have a direction and purpose to follow which could support them to stay within the workplace particularly during the most difficult times. Across the systematic review (chapter 4) and the narrative interviews (chapter 5), women with children recognised the sacrifices made in their careers and for their families, and placed limits on their own success at times, at times to protect themselves from additional stress or to protect their family from reduced time with them and at times to protect their career, considering the short-term value of being with their family over and above career progress. However, the constraints on these women in their decisions could have influenced this and with more support from the organisation or access to flexibility perhaps such sacrifices could have been mitigated or even avoided.

This research has contributed to the evidence of the motherhood penalty by supporting the findings that career decisions for women with children, as above, are based on some form of compromise, including re-prioritising aspirations, meeting needs of others or self-limiting success. Additionally, access to quality flexible working opportunities, particularly at the more senior levels remains a challenge, and barriers include reduced flexible working options which relate to time and location (temporal and spatial). This also relates to the perceived lack of visible examples of

flexible options which is compounded by the individualisation of careers and reliance on self-resources which means women with children are responsible for requesting their own flexible working pattern in the absence of good working examples.

7.4. Summary of research conclusions and outcomes

Collectively, these studies sought to answer the overall PhD research question, which was 'How are women's careers impacted by motherhood, from a psychological perspective?' Together the research studies offer the following key conclusions:

- Working women with children are drawing on self-resources (perceived resources available to them) when navigating their careers after children, and there is individualisation of career decisions
- Working women with children are also relational in their decisions, both in positive and negative terms
- Women with children are experiencing shifts and changes which impact on their careers, requiring flexibility and resilience over time.
- Women with children reported higher perceptions of internal employability compared to those without children, implying low external employability.
- For women with children the role of career self-efficacy appears to be a key contributing factor, over and above general self-efficacy in relation to employability.
- Career decisions for women with children are influenced by compromise, including re-prioritising aspirations, meeting needs of others or self-limiting success.

This thesis argues that the understanding of women with children's career experiences needs to go beyond the narrow focus on a motherhood pay penalty current and understand how women's careers are impacted by motherhood, from a *psychological* perspective. The aims were to understand factors impacting career decisions in working mothers' own words and to apply our current understanding of career theory to a specific population of working women with children and advance our knowledge of this group. Therefore, the overall contribution of this thesis in relation to

the research question: 'How are women's careers impacted by motherhood, from a psychological perspective?' was:

- To move away from the narrow focus on a motherhood pay penalty
- To understand factors impacting career decisions in working mothers' own words
- To apply our current understanding of career theory to a specific population of working women with children and advance our knowledge of this group
- To demonstrate the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers, which include:
 - An increased individualisation and required use of own resources
 - Drawing more on career than general self-efficacy for employability
 - Higher perceived internal employability, pointing to benefit of investing in developing external employability
 - Choices are compromised, due to re-prioritising aspirations, meeting needs of others and self-limiting success.

7.5. Practical implications

The current research set out to apply our current understanding of careers to a specific population of working women with children to advance knowledge in this field. The findings have also revealed some factors which could provide support to working women as they navigate their careers, both for the individual and for the organisation. Underpinning the current research is the influence of my own profession as an occupational psychologist, which drives me to not only build an evidence base through research, but also to provide support and increase participation in the workplace for all women including those with children.

7.5.1. *Implications of findings for individuals*

The research outcomes reinforced the importance for working mothers of maintaining their employability over time, as well as the value of flexibility and adaptability in both an individual and

an organisational context. Working mothers would benefit from further opportunities to identify strengths, motivations and gaining support in maintaining their determination, or resilience, would be helpful, for example through coaching or other developmental opportunities. This form of personal development and exploration would also support the recognition and understanding of work and family values whose congruence with decisions is significant (Powell & Greenhaus, 2012), as is the expression of those values (Aranda & Glick, 2014) in the workplace, which some participants, for example in the qualitative interviews (chapter 5) experienced as challenging.

One method of improving self-efficacy is through development and previous research has indicated that women with children would benefit from continued investment in their career competencies (knowing-whom, -how and -why competencies) for example by keeping on top of industry changes, attending conferences and in general “not neglect their learning and growth” (Cabrera, 2007, p.15). Whilst commendable, these suggestions place significant additional pressure on the women themselves to take on the burden of minimising certain barriers themselves. This again reinforces the importance of personal resources and positive self-efficacy for women with children as they navigate their working lives.

One’s career identity comprises factors such as interest, motivation and aspects of an individual’s personality or values and beliefs, thereby relating to how people see themselves in their career context (McArdle et al, 2007). Thus, it would be beneficial to consider updating this career identity through different methods of learning, taking risks, changing the ways in which they deal with challenges which can accompany any identity change work (Ibarra, 2002). The current research also indicated that a strong professional identity may be beneficial and could be utilised to support working mothers in terms of exploring their career progression, retention as well as personal wellbeing.

Finally, the findings provided compelling support for the model of critical career resources developed by Hirschi (2012) designed to draw together some of the existing career theories including career adaptability, employability, career motivation and the boundaryless career (see Figure 2 in 2.4). Using this lens to frame the findings has been helpful and could provide a

valuable framework to support career development interventions in the future. This could include discussing the current resources in an individual or group context, exploring any perceived barriers to accessing resources and providing more targeted support to create the conditions for women with children to thrive in their chosen career. As women with children may experience gaps in employment, regular reviews throughout the career lifecycle of women to maintain currency in skills and experience is vital (Arun et al., 2004). This approach also feeds into the sustainable career narrative which has been gaining traction, in terms of regularly reviewing and maintaining competencies required in the current career climate.

7.5.2. *Implications of findings for organisations*

The findings also point to organisational level interventions which could be beneficial to employers as well as employees. Typically, these have focused on flexible working (Working Families, 2019) and may also be insufficient for their intended purpose (Andersen, 2018). Additionally, they may have neglected the psychological components of the impact of motherhood, which have been the focus here. The findings of the current research highlights how individuals are increasingly responsible for their career decisions, which – whilst empowering – may disadvantage women with children as they are taking on responsibility for career decisions at a time when they may have lower levels of confidence and require the support of others.

The research indicates that there are multiple parental and motherhood transitions occurring at different stages, suggesting that more targeted, individualised support is required to enable women to continue to engage in the workplace at a level equal to men and women without children, according to their choices (Noon & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020). This could also include regular review of the tasks and responsibilities for those who may have work/family responsibilities for individuals to gain more meaning and control over their job activities and tasks and increase level of engagement and interest within roles (Alshabani & Soto, 2020). Organisations may consider re-crafting roles to take account of the changes occurring at different life stages even promoting the

use 'crafting experiments' to allow employees to explore and develop their sense of an evolving career identity, without longer term commitments or changes (Ibarra, 2002).

Another feature of the findings at the organisational level demonstrates the benefit of increasing the options and opportunities for more women with children to reach positions of seniority in order to be representative of the population and to bring diversity of thinking in the organisation at the senior levels. This is particularly an issue for those who require part-time or flexible working arrangements. This will also increase the availability and visibility of role models for women for whom this research shows are lacking, particularly in more male dominated professions and organisations. Empowering women to achieve positions of seniority can influence role modelling and confidence building (KPMG, 2015). Our research reinforced these factors, and also the importance of access to quality flexible working opportunities, particularly at the more senior levels also remains a challenge, and barriers include reduced flexible working options which relate to time and location. Clear visible examples of flexible options relating to temporal and spatial flexibility are warranted, which some participants expressed were not always available to them, or familiar. Examples could include flexing start and finish times, working term time, mobile or home working or compressed hours, some of which promoted by the Government (UK Gov, N.D.) or bodies such as CIPD (CIPD, 2021) but not always familiar to employees and employers and also may not be tried and tested by the organisation, which could cause some apprehension. Organisations can be creative in their flexibility including encouraging working any 5 days from 7, promoting manager training, measuring targets in different ways (CIPD, 2021), in other words interventions which are not focused on presenteeism and allow for variable flexibility. Introducing such ideas would require more open communication around flexible working and ongoing review – something that will at the same time demonstrate the organisation's commitment towards supporting working lives of employees alongside family and other commitments (Putnam et al., 2014).

Finally, and importantly, there is a further support for managers and employers to develop their psychological flexibility demonstrated by the current research and something which organisations

can invest time and energy in. This relates to the shifts, and changes demonstrated by the research, whereby women with children may require different levels of support at different stages, and an understanding of these changes along with a level of understanding from supervisors and the organisation could be beneficial. Indeed, developing more egalitarian norms in organisations may reduce feelings of guilt and help mothers to focus on both career and family (Aarntsen et al., 2021).

7.6. Research strengths, limitations, and future research directions

7.6.1. *Strengths and Limitations*

The research contained within this thesis was designed to take an exploratory approach to an understanding of the factors influencing women with children's career decisions. This is a wide and varied topic, which has been recognised as such by previous authors, including one spread across disciplines (Zimmerman & Clark, 2016). Therefore, the modest contribution provided by this study should thus be considered in light of this wide and varied body of research. Limitations were explored in relation to each individual study. Certain limitations with regards to the overall research should also be considered.

First, although representing some variety in relation to role, industry, and sector, all three studies included participants from professional roles, and therefore do not represent the views of women working in lower-paid or lower skilled roles. This feature was in line with the research design, which deliberately focused on this population, for the systematic review partially for restricting the potential studies into manageable numbers. However, the existing literature has been charged with focusing primarily on the white, middle class and professional experience (Buzanell et al., 2005). This research may unintentionally perpetuate such issues of underrepresentation of certain career groups and so future research could include additional professions and career categories to better represent the diversity of the communities of working mothers. In the qualitative research, which was also designed to focus on professional working mothers, no professions were specified to participants in advance, and all participants represented a career which could be considered

professional. To further increase diversity of representation efforts were made to ensure that the participants were representative of a diverse background, through advertising on diverse groups on LinkedIn including relating to disability and ethnicity. Details of participant's ethnicity were not captured as that was not included in that study's ethics application to minimise the level of identifying data requested. This could be included in future research to improve transparency of inclusion as is being promoted for all clinical trials to reduce bias and ultimately ensure that any findings can be generalisable to the whole population (NIH, 2019). This diversity of representation could also include valuable information on the organisational context, which could be influential. For example, capturing data on the organisation's practices regarding supporting women or flexible working. The report by the firm ECC discussed in the introduction (see 1.3.) reviewed organisation's websites to investigate visibility of policies on flexible working arrangements, pay and duration of parental leave, such information could provide additional insight to consider factors influencing working mothers related to organisational support.

Some of the research studies, in particular the qualitative interviews, required participants to draw on information which may have taken place some time ago. This could have impacted on the memory of events and therefore on the accuracy of the information presented. However, one of the principles underlying the narrative interview approach is to gather information from the participants perspective, placing the participant at the heart (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016) and facilitating the participants to respond with content they feel is most relevant to them (Choak, 2012). This relies on their construction of events as reality. Indeed, as outlined in the methodology (3.2.1.) the selected mixed methods approach recognizes the objective and subjective views of reality co-existing, and potentially providing a more complete representation of events (Ansari et al., 2016). This approach also recognises that the ways in which participants may remember certain events is valuable information and thus inaccurate recall is not necessarily detrimental to the research. There is also some interesting potential here to consider exploring experiences of working mothers alongside the perspective of others also for example carrying out interviews

which includes managers or other relevant individuals which could provide additional insight and alternative perspectives into the issues being discussed.

During the period this research was carried out, the covid pandemic disrupted the professional and personal lives of people all around the world. This led to a significant amount of change to careers through the resulting mandates from Governments and organisations to manage the associated issues and risks and depicted in the literature as a substantial 'career shock' (Akkermans et al., 2020). The public health risk from the pandemic resulted in requirements to work from home, engage with children's education at home due to school closures and changes to responsibilities due to short-term closures of business resulting in staff being on furlough. This PhD commenced in October 2018, with research activities occurring primarily during 2019 and 2020. As highlighted in section 5.4, the pandemic impacted considerably on many women including those with children, potentially exacerbating existing issues surrounding career progress. After much discussion between researcher and supervisor it was concluded that the impact of the Covid pandemic on women's careers, including working mothers, would be best explored in future research studies and these issues are not in the scope of the current thesis. In relation to the research activities, the timing of the pandemic occurred during the first stage of the qualitative interviews which were conducted on zoom, as originally planned (5.2.4) and therefore not a significant change. Whilst participants were experiencing some changes to their work, at the time of the interview there were no issues identified by participants in relation to their working lives, or factors impacted on their ability to take part in the interview. In addition, the purpose of the interview was to reflect on experience of their career decisions to date. However, it is important to highlight the wider context surrounding the interviews and recognise that these issues were impactful. This is something which would be beneficial to explore further in future research as discussed next.

7.6.2. Future research

Based on the findings it is possible to identify some potential future research which can build on the outcomes from the current research and further develop knowledge in this area. Those outlined relate to the areas of employability, transitions, and professional identity.

We could see from the research that women with children reported higher perceptions of internal employability compared to those without children. This may suggest that mothers have lower external employability which could be related to other factors identified by the research such as low levels of confidence, perceived lack of opportunities, poor flexible working options in unfamiliar organisations. The current research indicates that internal and external employability differs for women with children and therefore more in-depth exploration of these factors would be valuable. The research highlights the value of further incorporating the perspectives of working mothers relating to their experience of navigating career decisions over time and so building on this future research should encourage more participation on personal perspectives to interrogate the nuances in some of the themes identified in this research. This future research could also incorporate the perspectives of others. As pointed out in the overall limitations (7.6.1) this may provide additional and valuable insight into the issues from another viewpoint, particularly as the findings have demonstrated the importance of support from others for working mothers, including managers and partner. The findings of some of the studies selected in the systematic review proposed that incorporating the views of partners would be beneficial to understanding more about the issues facing working mothers (see 4.5), also linked with the relational decision making found in research studies 2 and 3 (chapters 5 & 6). Also, it would be interesting to explore the experiences of fathers who are the primary caregivers, or whose careers may experience interruptions, shifts, and changes due to being a parent.

In this discussion it was mentioned that additional research on the specific transition points would be beneficial to highlight the factors driving these transitions at different stages. This was not the focus of the current study, which looked at the overall influences however there were some interesting shifts and changes occurring which could be explored further. This could be

investigated further through additional research, including longitudinally using a specific group of working mothers over a course of several years, such as followed throughout their mid-career at 5-year intervals. Furthermore, this could explore whether the timing of motherhood, in relation to career progression, is important. It could explore establishment of career prior to motherhood and the subsequent career progression, potentially in relation to self-efficacy. This was not something which could be explored through the current study due to restrictions of time and availability of resources for longitudinal research. As outlined above the timing of the interviews coincided with the 'first wave' of the Covid pandemic in the UK. It could be interesting to follow up with the interview participants to explore possible ways in which the themes may have shifted and changed in relation to their recent experiences and understand the impact of the pandemic 'career shock' (Akkermans et al., 2020).

Professional identity was highlighted in the current research as an influential factor for some women for example in the qualitative interviews where it formed a protective barrier and shaped certain clear decisions. The current study pointed towards shifts in identity and career outcomes in relation to professional identity for example however future research could focus on this in more depth, for example looking at the specific relationship of professional identity to career outcomes, in relation to being a parent. This could be interesting to explore for both mothers and fathers, or women with and without children in a comparative survey, using a measure of occupational identity.

7.7. Conclusion

This thesis has brought together the research on career decisions of working mothers, to contribute to current and future research, and identified specific factors which influence the career decisions of working mothers including recognising the shifts and changes over time as well as individualisation of career decisions. Women experience barriers to accessing flexibility and progressing in certain roles and recognise the value of relationships with, and support from, significant others including supervisors, in navigating those decisions. This research has

contributed to theory on career resources, employability, and the motherhood penalty by extending the current view of career theory using women only participants, and specifically women with children. In addition, this adds to our contextual understanding of contemporary career theory as shifting and non-linear with much responsibility placed on the individual, highlighting the importance of understanding, and supporting psychological resources such as self-efficacy as well investing in employability for both the individual and the organisation.

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[Toc96867976](#) **Appendix A: Tables and Figures for process of systematic review
(chapter 4)**

Table A1: List of databases searched for systematic review (chapter 4)

Database
Web of Science
Scopus
Business source premier
ProQuest (7 databases ⁴)

Table A2: Search terms for systematic review (chapter 4)

Search terms
Mother* OR maternal AND
Career OR work OR occupation OR job OR employment OR vocation* OR profession*
AND
Decision OR decide OR choice OR choose OR explor* OR prefer* OR sensemak* OR
transition OR option*

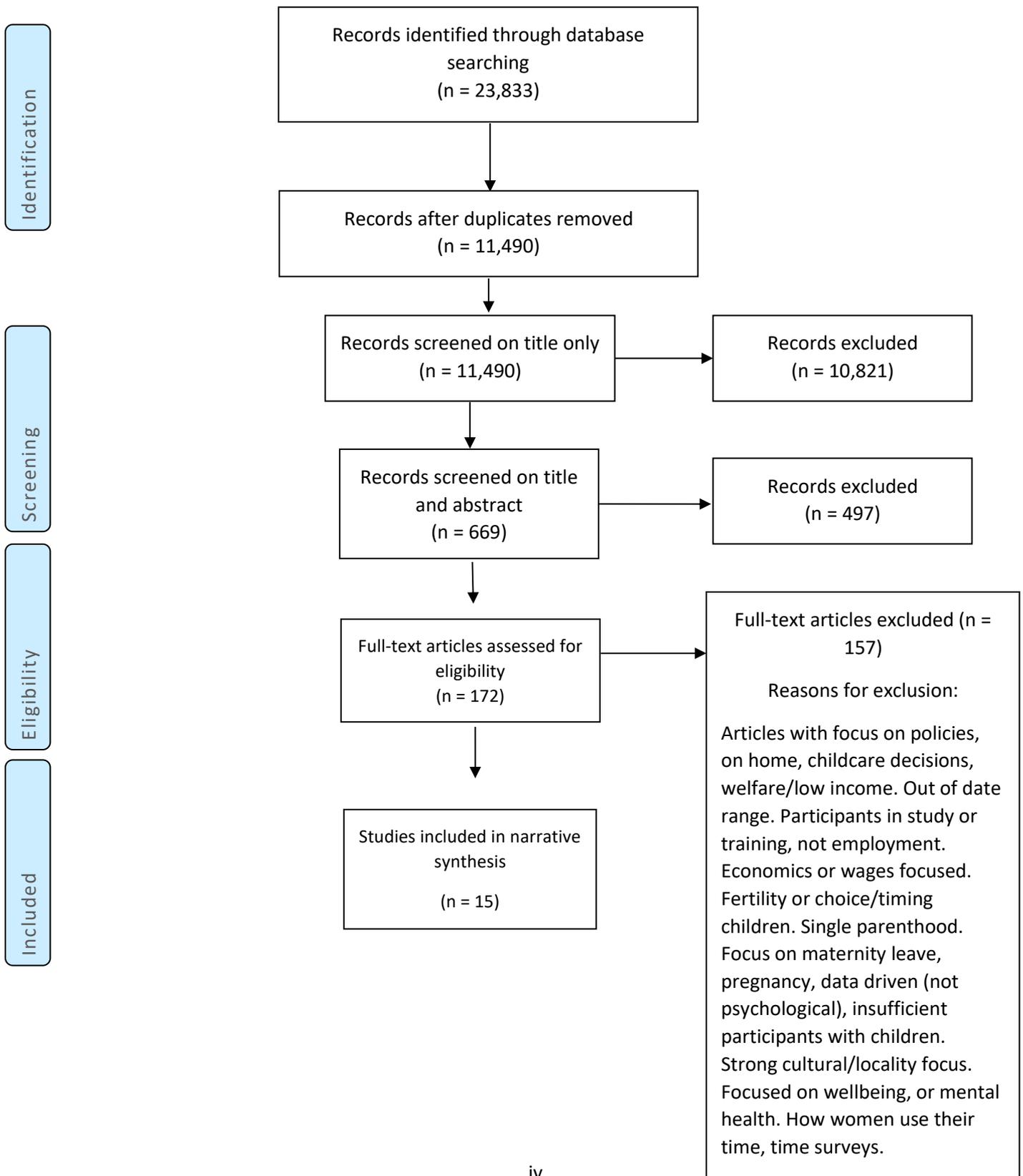
⁴ Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts, Health and Medical Collection, Nursing and Allied Health, Psychology, Humanities Index, Proquest dissertations and theses and PsychArticles

Table A3: Quality appraisal summary for 15 extracted studies in systematic review (chapter 4)

Author(s)	Abstract and title	Introduction and aims	Method and data	Sampling	Data analysis	Ethics and bias	Findings/ results	Transferability / generalizability	Implications and usefulness
Jackson & Scharman (2002)	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good
Marks & Houston (2002)	Very poor (none)	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Rubin & Wooten (2007)	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Grady & McCarthy (2008)	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Fair	Good
Halrynjo & Lyng (2009)	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Grant-Vallone & Ensher (2011)	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair
Duberley & Carrigan (2013)	Good	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Ruitenber (2014)	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Lewis et al. (2015)	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair
Stockey-Bridge (2015)	Good	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Fair
Rushing & Sparks (2017)	Good	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good	Good
Foley et al. (2018)	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Lim & Rasdi (2019)	Good	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good	Good
Whittington (2019)	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Breen & Leung (2020)	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good

Figure A1: Summary of results from systematic review (flow chart) for systematic review (chapter 4)

Systematic review of the psychological factors influencing the career decisions of working mothers, conducted/published over the period January 1999–December 2020



Appendix B: Developing analytical themes from systematic review (chapter 4)

Note: numbering has changed for final presentation of themes.

② Shifting priorities

motherhood more important than work 9

Shifting meaning of balance	
Career driven plus quality of family life	12 ✓
New identity in combining both	1 ✓
Reciprocal relational process between work and family (transfer personal resources between)	15 ✓
Being better mothers because of working	4 ✓
Pride in managing both roles	1 ✓
Family devotion as alternative source of meaning	5 ✓
Strength of work commitment (reinforced by work involvement)	9
Flexibility = two way (commitment)	3 ✓
Role combination gives meaning	3 ✓
Managing both roles gives meaning	7
Shift in 'schemas of devotion'	5 ✓
Short term changes contributed to long term success	14 ✓
Re-established boundaries	14 ✓
Challenge, meaning, flexibility	17 ✓
Intellectual stimulation/ creativity	2
Challenge	3
Meaningful/satisfying	4
Desire for satisfying work (paradox not achievable)	6
Work = meaning	13
	3

advanced planning → flexibility (stacked bridge) (B)

⑥ Challenge meaning

Opportunity/choice ①

Shift in structure of opportunity	15
Not voluntary choice/decision ('pushed out')	8
'opportunity entrepreneurs' -	15
Exercising choice (opportunity)	15
'convenience entrepreneurs'	1
Reaction to organisational culture	2
Privatised clash of commitments	5
Individualised solutions	3
Proactive decision makers (agents)	1

A 15 list

⑦ Family needs

Family-related factors	2
Same experience for all children	13
Ages of children	7
More secure in work with one parent at home	12
Own experience with stay-at-home mother	10
Family motivations (time with children)	10
Influence children's upbringing / maintain connection	10

No one else can provide care to children

⑤ Autonomy Control

Autonomy, flexibility, control of time	15
Autonomy flexibility	1
Autonomy/freedom (SE)	8
Control	7
Planning for flexibility	13
Flexibility	14
Flexibility	8
Autonomy/meaning/flexibility	7
Autonomy	2
Flexibility	4
Formal and informal (flexibility)	3
Independence	2
Creating a flexible career	6
Mid-career (more control)	3
Social support	15
Support network	13
Relational process	15
Support of others	4
Intrinsic/social aspects of work	11
Support of others in decision making (partner) - Co-operative style	6
Partner support	14
Relationism	8

Social support
⑨

Sacrifices	13
Self-limiting success	1
Reducing ambitions	5
Self-limit success ('spread thin')	14
Limit time away	14
Sacrifices / trade-offs	2
Trade-offs (sacrifices)	6

Sacrifices
⑩

Negative judgements	14
Compare self to others - ideal mother	13
'good enough'	4
'good mother'	2
'good mother'	1
'good mother'	7
'good mother'	13

③ Perceptions of others
'ideals'

④ Personal resources

Uncertainty/ambiguity (tolerating)	6
Capability to adjust to new pace	8
Personal values	15
Assess values/beliefs	3
Individual core values	8
Pioneering spirit	6
Creative/risk taking	6
Weighed up pros and cons	6
Perceptions of self	12
Self-efficacy	3
Identity and fulfilment associated with education	6
Self-identity	11
in those with most work engagement: Self-identity from work, independence (financial), negative feelings towards motherhood	4
Confidence in abilities low	11
	13

⑧ Feelings

Persisting role tensions	7
Failed attempts at role congruence	7
Reduce stress	12
Stress as catalyst	10
Surprising feelings	6
'Stress' = meaningful/rewarding	6
Guilt from professional childcare	8
Challenges of staying home loss of validation, guilt/shame	10
Guilt (being away from home)	14
'failing to deliver'	5
Sense of security / piece of mind	10
Mental health	4
Seeking self-balance ('third sphere')	3
Negative aspects of motherhood as boring, exhausting, stressful, isolating	9
Self-care / personal growth	9
	10

Appendix C: Initial recruitment invitation for qualitative interviews advertised via LinkedIn (chapter 5)

Would you like to take part in research on the impact of motherhood on careers?

I am looking for a small number of UK-based volunteers to take part in online interviews.

I am conducting this research as part of my PhD on the impact of motherhood on women's careers. Using online interviews, I will be exploring the experiences of working mothers in regard to their career decisions, including the factors which have influenced those career decisions over time. More details will be provided if you would like to take part.

To take part you will be a UK based working mother with at least one child under the age of 18, employed or self-employed (part/full-time). You would need to be available for a one-hour online interview between now and July 2020. The interviews will be arranged at your convenience.

For more information please DM or contact susie.phillips-baker@northumbria.ac.uk.

The study has been approved by Northumbria University Psychology Postgraduate Ethics.

Appendix D: Pre-research information for interview participants (chapter 5)

Subject: Pre-research information for participants (qualitative interviews)

Hi *Name*,

Thank you so much for your interest in supporting my research, I really appreciate it.

As you may have seen on the posted information about the research, I'm completing a PhD with Northumbria University on the impact of motherhood on careers and this study will form part of the overall research.

To follow is some more information to help you decide if you still want to take part – you can withdraw your interest at any stage.

To take part you may be employed or self-employed, and primarily UK-based, with at least one child under the age of 18. The interview will take place over zoom, for approximately 60 minutes. It will be recorded and then deleted once transcribed. No identifying information will be included in the transcript. I will be asking for some basic biographical details: age, marital status, type of organisation, nature of employment, typical working hours and number & age of children. These will be stored using a code rather than your name, your email will be retained purely for initial contact purposes.

In the interview, I will be asking you to tell me about your career 'story' to date, in the form of a narrative interview. The interview will start with a question from me, and you will be given as much time as you would like to talk through your career including decisions you have made and how you think motherhood may have influenced this. I will intervene as little as possible but will help you along if needed. You may find the interview brings up some personal information, and of course you are in control over how much of this you would like to share. I want to share that in one pilot (test) interview, it was described as an 'emotional' as well as a positive experience.

If you are still interested in getting involved, the first thing I would ask is if you can please read the attached participant information sheet which outlines the study in more detail including the details on confidentiality and ethics. Please read through and let me know if you have any questions.

Then, if you could send me some suitable days/times (between now and July) I'll then send you an invitation to interview plus final instructions. There will be no specific preparation or pre-work to do, however when we book in the interview, I will send more information on what you might like to think about in advance of the interview.

Any questions at all, or if you would like to speak before making your final decision, please feel free to call me on the mobile below.

Best wishes,

Appendix E: Information sheet for participants for qualitative interviews (chapter 5)

Exploring the career decisions and choices for working mothers

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide it is important for you to read this leaflet so you understand why the study is being carried out and what it will involve.

Reading this leaflet, discussing it with others or asking any questions you might have will help you decide whether, or not you would like to take part.

What is the Purpose of the Study?

The aim of the study is to understand the experiences of working mothers in how they make decisions regarding their career and the factors which have influenced those career decisions. This study will be conducted via online interviews which will explore the experiences and decisions of employed and self-employed women with child(ren) under the age of 18.

I am conducting this study as part of my PhD on the impact of motherhood on women's careers, at Northumbria University.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited as you have indicated that you may be interested in being involved in the research into career decisions of working mothers.

You are eligible to take part if you have a child or children under the age(s) of 18.

Participants should be currently employed or self-employed. You may be working part-time or full-time and working in the private, public or third sector.

You are eligible if your work is primarily based in the UK.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you whether you would like to take part in the research. I am giving you this information sheet to help you make that decision. If you do decide to take part, remember that you can stop being involved in the study whenever you choose, without telling me why. You are completely free to decide whether, or not to take part, or to take part and then let me know afterwards that you would like to withdraw your participation by sending me an email to the email provided in this sheet.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be asked to take part in an online interview of between 50- and 60-minutes duration. If you agree to take part, you will be sent details of how the interview will be conducted.

Taking part will not require access to any specific software. If you do decide to take part, you will also be provided with a consent form which you will be asked to complete.

Once you have completed the interview, the researcher will provide you with a debrief sheet explaining the nature of the research, how you can find out about the results, and how you can withdraw your data if you wish. It is estimated that the total time to complete one interview will be no more than 60 minutes and no further participation is required.

With your permission I will need to audio-record this interview, to make sure I remember everything you talk about in detail. Following the interview, I will make a written transcript and then delete the audio recording.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

There should be no disadvantages to taking part in this study, apart from the time taken to be interviewed. The interview will be conducted one-to-one, and the researcher will ensure that you are fully briefed and comfortable before you begin and understand how the interview will be conducted and how your data will be used. The interviews will be designed to explore your career experiences and decisions and therefore are unlikely to cause any emotional or psychological discomfort.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By taking part in the study, you will be participating in research to understand the career decisions and experiences of working mothers. By taking part and telling us your experience you will be helping to add to the research and in turn to how much we understand about the factors which influence working mothers' career decisions. It is hoped that individuals and organisations may be able to learn and benefit from that information, in order to support working mothers to flourish in employment.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential and anonymous?

Yes, you will be provided with a unique participant code in order to ensure your anonymity, once the interview is set up. This code will be used (instead of your name) on all documents pertaining to you. You can use this code to withdraw your consent, should you wish to do so after the interview has been conducted.

Should any personally identifiable information be present in the transcript, then this will either be replaced with pseudonyms, or the section removed.

How will my data be stored, and how long will it be stored for?

All electronic data including the recordings from your interview, typed-up transcripts from your interview and your consent forms (all stored electronically) will be stored on the University U drive, which is password protected. All data will be stored in accordance with university guidelines and the Data Protection Act (2018).

Anonymised data will be retained in for a period of at least 3 years from the end of the project (September 2021), in accordance with the University’s Research Records Retention Schedule (principle of storage limitation). Where possible and applicable, research data that are not in a digital format will be digitised to facilitate access

What categories of personal data will be collected and processed in this study?

The categories of personal data collected and processed in this study will be contact details, required to arrange the interviews. Permission will be sought to store contact details for any follow up (should participants wish to receive results of the study). No other personal details will be recorded.

What is the legal basis for processing personal data?

According to GDPR Article 6(1) I “processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest”.

You have the following rights:

- A right of access to a copy of the information comprised in their personal data (to do so you should submit a [Subject Access Request](#); a right in certain circumstances to have inaccurate personal data rectified; and a right to object to decisions being taken by automated means.
- If you are dissatisfied in any way with the University’s processing of personal data, you have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner’s Office. For more information see [the ICO website](#).

Who are the recipients or categories of recipients of personal data, if any?

Only the researcher and potentially supervisor will be using, analysing or otherwise processing the personal data collected in the study. The research will not involve transferring personally identifiable data to third parties for any reason.

What will happen to the results of the study and could personal data collected be used in future research?

The general findings might be reported in a scientific journal or presented at a research conference. However, the data will be anonymized and you or the data you have provided will not be personally identifiable. We can provide you with a summary of the findings from the study if you email the researcher at the address listed below. Personal data will not be used in future research unless we have sought express permission to do so.

Who is Organizing and Funding the Study?

Northumbria University

Who has reviewed this study?

Before this study could begin, permissions were obtained from Northumbria University.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?

The research project, submission reference 23225 has been approved in Northumbria University's Ethics Online system. It has been reviewed to safeguard your interests and have granted approval to conduct the study.

Contact for further information:

**Researcher email: susie.phillips-baker@northumbria.ac.uk Supervisor email:
vicki.elsey@northumbria.ac.uk**

**Name and contact details of the Records and Information Officer at
Northumbria University: Duncan James (dp.officer@northumbria.ac.uk).**

www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/leadership-governance/vice-chancellorsoffice/legal-services-team/gdpr/gdpr---privacy-notice or by contacting a member of the research team

Appendix F: Pre-research information for qualitative interview participants (chapter 5)

Subject: Pre-research information (for qualitative interview participants)

Hi *Name*,

Just one more email from me! I wanted to cover everything before the interview. You should have an invitation for a zoom call on *DATE* at *TIME*. Any issues in advance or with the link etc, just drop me a text (my number is below).

On to the interview:

I will be asking you to discuss your career so far in the form of a narrative interview. If you have not completed one before, in brief I will be asking you an open-ended research question about your career so far, including the influence of motherhood, and allow you to tell me your story with minimal input until you are finished. At which stage I will ask any follow up questions. I will go through the details again when we speak.

As I mentioned before, you do not need to do anything in advance, however you are welcome to take a few moments beforehand reflecting on your career and some of the decisions you made over the course of your career until now. It may help you to draw a visual timeline. If you do capture anything in advance, you do not need to share this with me, but you might like to have it with you at the interview.

You already received the participant information sheet (let me know if you want another copy). Attached is a consent form – I'll go through that with you when we speak so no need to return it beforehand.

Any questions at all, please let me know.

Best wishes,

Appendix G: Consent form for Qualitative interview participants (chapter 5)

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: *Exploring the career decisions of working mothers (using online narrative interview)*

Principal Investigator: *Susie Phillips-Baker*

Please tick where applicable -

I have carefully read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study and I have received satisfactory answers.

I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason for withdrawing, and without prejudice.

I agree to take part in this study.

I agree to the session being recorded.

I also consent to the retention of this data under the condition that any subsequent use also be restricted to research projects that have gained ethical approval from Northumbria University.

Signature of participant.....

Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)

Signature of researcher Date.....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)

Appendix H: Debrief sheet for Qualitative interview participants (chapter 5)



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

Participant code:

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF

Name of Researcher: Susie Phillips-Baker

Name of Supervisor (if relevant): Dr Vicki Elsey

Project Title: Exploring the career decisions and choices for working mothers

4. What was the purpose of the project?

The aim of this study was to understand more about the career decisions of working mothers from their own perspective. This includes how and why women with children make decisions regarding their career and the factors which have influenced those career decisions. We hope this will add valuable understanding to the research around how a working mothers career develops, including their specific needs. We want to help individuals and organisations to understand their unique challenges and circumstances in order to better support this large proportion of the workforce.

If you would like to seek some additional advice or guidance following the interview regarding any of the topics you may have covered, please find a list of organisations which may be useful:

<https://workingfamilies.org.uk/> - Working Families is the UK's work-life balance charity., helping working parents, carers and their employers to find a better balance between responsibilities at home and in the workplace.

<https://www.home-start.org.uk/supporting-young-mothers> – Home-Start is a local community network of trained volunteers and expert support helping families with young children through their challenging times. We are there for parents when they need us the most because childhood can't wait.

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/childcare-parenting/financial-help-children> – Information from the Government including on working and financial help for working parents.

2. How will I find out about the results?

You can find out about the results, once the study has been completed and the data analysed, which will be approximately 10-12 weeks after taking part. After this time, you may request the researcher email you a general summary of the results.

5. If I change my mind and wish to withdraw the information I have provided, how do I do this?

If you change your mind, you may withdraw your consent at any stage in the next 8 weeks (until the data is analysed). You have been provided with a unique participant code in order to ensure your anonymity. Therefore, you can contact the researcher if you should wish to withdraw your consent quoting this code.

The data collected in this study may also be published in scientific journals or presented at conferences. Information and data gathered during this research study will only be available to the research team identified in the information sheet. Should the research be presented or published in any form, all data will be anonymous (i.e. your personal information or data will not be identifiable).

All information and data gathered during this research will be stored in line with the Data Protection Act and will be destroyed 36 months following the conclusion of the study (this is because it forms part of a PhD which will be assessed in 24-36 months. If the research is published in a scientific journal, it may be kept for longer before being destroyed. During that time the data may be used by members of the research team only for purposes appropriate to the research question, but at no point will your personal information or data be revealed. Insurance companies and employers will not be given any individual's personal information, nor any data provided by them, and nor will we allow access to the police, security services, social services, relatives or lawyers, unless forced to do so by the courts.

If you wish to receive feedback about the findings of this research study, then please contact the researcher at susie.phillips-baker@northumbria.ac.uk.

This study and its protocol have received full ethical approval from Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee. If you require confirmation of this, or if you have any concerns or worries concerning this research, or if you wish to register a complaint, please contact the Chair of this Committee, Professor Nick Neave stating the title of the research project and the name of the researcher: nick.neave@northumbria.ac.uk

Appendix I: Thematic analysis – early nodes during analysis (chapter 6)

18/02/2021 16:55

Node Structure Narrative interviews 22.1.21 18/02/2021 16:55

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Node			
Nodes			
Nodes\Alternative career course without children		No	None
Nodes\bad working environment		No	None
Nodes\barriers for skillset		No	None
Nodes\Being a minority in workplace		No	None
Nodes\Being in work (positives)		No	None
Nodes\Being main earner		No	None
Nodes\Benefit of exploring career options		No	None
Nodes\benefit of having children to career decisions		No	None
Nodes\Benefit of professional childcare arrangements	Childcare	No	None
Nodes\benefit of time away from children for work		No	None
Nodes\Benefits (salary, holidays)		No	None
Nodes\building up confidence with opportunities	Confidence (General)	No	None
Nodes\Burnt out from study or volunteering plus and family	study Confidence	No	None
Nodes\Career low confidence		No	None
Nodes\Career moves (pre-children)		No	None
Nodes\Career progress while children young	young children	No	None
Nodes\Challenges sharing work with colleagues		No	None
Nodes\Challenges transitioning to self-employed	SE.	No	None
Nodes\Challenging authority to support others		No	None
Nodes\Challenging role (pre-children)		No	None
Nodes\Challenging upbringing		No	Purple
Nodes\changed career path after experience	?	No	None
Nodes\Changes in business over time	SE?	No	None
Nodes\Changes in Org Dept whilst on ML	ML experience	No	None
Nodes\Changes to maternity leave pay	Policies	No	None
Nodes\changes to working hours	patterns	No	None
Nodes\child medical issues		No	None
Nodes\Child schooling		No	None
Nodes\Children of partner		No	None
Nodes\clashing of work time and children events		No	None
Nodes\class and socioeconomic status	Minority? - rename	No	None
Nodes\commitment to organisation	STAY	No	None

stalled?

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Nodes\Competence in new role	Confidence? reasons to stay/move?	No	None
Nodes\Compromised position (professionally)	What?	No	None
Nodes\considering right time to have children re work	Planning	No	None
Nodes\delay to career from late start	Gender differences	No	None
Nodes\Difference for male colleagues	Role specifics	No	None
Nodes\Difference in busy periods of role	Number of children	No	None
Nodes\Difference of more than one child	Role	No	None
Nodes\different (worse) in Senior levels	Career Plan	No	None
Nodes\different career trajectory than expected		No	None
Nodes\difficult career decisions		No	None
Nodes\Difficult decision to have children		No	None
Nodes\difficult working conditions (pre children)		No	None
Nodes\Difficulties returning to work environment	RTW issues	No	None
Nodes\difficulty in pregnancy	Pregnancy experience	No	None
Nodes\difficulty staying in workplace		No	None
Nodes\discussing options with manager (maternity)		No	None
Nodes\Discussing options with partner (post-chil)		No	None
Nodes\Discussing options with partner (pre-chil)		No	None
Nodes\doing the job well	GOOD WORKER	No	None
Nodes\domestic responsibilities		No	None
Nodes\Domestic support e.g. cleaner		No	None
Nodes\done my best to have career and family	DUAL	No	None
Nodes\doubting authority		No	None
Nodes\Drive determination		No	None
Nodes\Early career aspirations	EARLY	No	None
Nodes\Early career aspirations linked to children	Planning	No	None
Nodes\early career influences	Early	No	None
Nodes\Early education	Early	No	None
Nodes\early independence		No	None
Nodes\early planning for having children financial maternity	Planning	No	None
Nodes\Early promotions	early	No	None
Nodes\learning more than partner		No	None
Nodes\economic downturn		No	None
Nodes\education and career no link	NO PLAN?	No	None
Nodes\Education post children	EDUCATION/STUDY	No	None
Nodes\Educational goals		No	None
Nodes\emotional impact of poor manager	BAD MGR	No	None
Nodes\Emotional impact of working hours	HOURS	No	None
Nodes\Employer ok with work around childcare	FLEXIBLE MANAGER	No	None
Nodes\Enjoyed maternity leave	ML experience	No	None
Nodes\Enjoying being a mother	Mother role important	No	None

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Nodes\Enjoying time at home with child(ren)	Mother role	No	None
Nodes\Enjoying work	work role	No	None
Nodes\Existing flexible working policies	polices	No	None
Nodes\Fast Pregnancy to ML	prep for ML	No	None
Nodes\Fear of losing flexible working		No	None
Nodes\Feel pride in self validated	SELF PRIDE (protective?)	No	None
Nodes\Feeling badly treated by business		No	None
Nodes\Feeling disillusioned		No	None
Nodes\Feeling flexible working was possible	check.	No	None
Nodes\Feeling undermined ideas taken by others	Gender?	No	None
Nodes\Feeling vulnerable (new baby)	RtW	No	None
Nodes\feelings about childcare responsibility		No	None
Nodes\Feelings about financial earnings contribution		No	None
Nodes\Feelings about lack of flexibility or support	from whom?	No	None
Nodes\Feelings about self-employment	SE.	No	None
Nodes\Feelings about type of childcare	Childcare arrangements		None
Nodes\Feelings about working out of contracted hours	Accept to work	No	None
Nodes\Feelings and impact of being a mother		No	None
Nodes\Feelings around leaving baby at home	RtW	No	None
Nodes\Feelings of being put aside in Organisation		No	None
Nodes\Female leader no flexibility	MANAGER NOT SUPP.	No	None
Nodes\female or mother manager	Also parent.	No	None
Nodes\feminist views		No	None
Nodes\Financial challenges early on	early	No	None
Nodes\financial impact of children	COST OF CHILDREN	No	None
Nodes\financial impact of self-employment	SE.	No	None
Nodes\financial security		No	None
Nodes\Financial support (government)		No	None
Nodes\Financial support (Organisation)		No	None
Nodes\Financial support from partner		No	None
Nodes\financially worthwhile	WEIGHTING UP COSTS?	No	None
Nodes\finding last minute childcare	↳ CHILDCARE informal	No	None
Nodes\First child born (timing)		No	None
Nodes\First 'proper' job		No	None
Nodes\First trimester	Pregnancy	No	None
Nodes\fitting in to team and culture		No	None
Nodes\Fitting work around baby	RtW	No	None
Nodes\Fitting work around school hours and holidays		No	None
Nodes\Flexible Organisation		No	None
Nodes\Following precedent in PT	polices	No	None
Nodes\Fulfilling purpose beyond home	WORK ROLE	No	None

@ informal
 (b) formal (arrangements) (cost) (feelings?)
 Childcare

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Nodes\\Gaining clients and leads from mothers	Network	No	None
Nodes\\gaps in career e.g. ML etc	GAPS	No	None
Nodes\\Gardening leave		No	None
Nodes\\Give and take flexibility		No	None
Nodes\\Glad stayed working		No	None
Nodes\\good enough	? n/m or worker	No	None
Nodes\\Good maternity package	ML Planning exp.	No	None
Nodes\\gradual RTW	RTW	No	None
Nodes\\guilt	Review	No	None
Nodes\\happy to be pregnant	Planning pregnancy exp	No	None
Nodes\\happy with work life 'balance'		No	None
Nodes\\Having more time for self	wellbeing prioritising pregnancy exp	No	None
Nodes\\Healthy pregnancy		No	None
Nodes\\hidden issue	?	No	None
Nodes\\Husband main breadwinner		No	None
Nodes\\husbands work		No	None
Nodes\\impact of being driven ambitious	drive	No	None
Nodes\\impact of being 'supported' (org or Mgr)	check	No	None
Nodes\\Impact of certain decisions on subsequent career		No	None
Nodes\\Impact of difficulties in pregnancy	Pregnancy exp	No	None
Nodes\\impact of gradual RTW	RTW	No	None
Nodes\\impact of issues conceiving	Pregnancy exp	No	None
Nodes\\impact of lack of experience early on		No	None
Nodes\\Impact of lack of support (from Org)		No	None
Nodes\\Impact of leaving workplace on re-entering		No	None
Nodes\\Impact of loss of independence		No	None
Nodes\\impact of negative comments views of others		No	None
Nodes\\Impact of partner doing childcare	childcare	No	None
Nodes\\Impact of partners work		No	None
Nodes\\Impact of positive views support from others		No	None
Nodes\\Impact of precarious position (funding)		No	None
Nodes\\Impact of pregnancy on role		No	None
Nodes\\impact of re-entering education re-training	educ. / STUDY	No	None
Nodes\\Impact of trying to conceive on work	preg.	No	None
Nodes\\Impact of upbringing on providing opportunities for children		No	None
Nodes\\Importance of or maintaining reputation	Prof identity?	No	None
Nodes\\Importance of Peer support	PEER	No	None
Nodes\\Improved career options		No	None
Nodes\\Individual responsibility to manage job	INDIVIDUAL	No	None
Nodes\\Informal childcare arrangement	Childcare informal	No	None
Nodes\\Informing work manager of pregnancy	announcing pregnancy	No	None

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Nodes\Job loss		No	None
Nodes\Job not compatible with children		No	None
Nodes\Job sharing full time role	ROLE WORK ARRANG.	No	None
Nodes\Jobs not career		No	None
Nodes\Journey from seeing career as more important		No	None
Nodes\Juggling different childcare	Childcare issues?	No	None
Nodes\keeping motivation up for going into work	Resilience determination	No	None
Nodes\knowing self personality personal resources		No	None
Nodes\Lack of career models		No	None
Nodes\Lack of control autonomy		No	None
Nodes\Lack of control autonomy (pre children)	early	No	None
Nodes\Lack of role models		No	None
Nodes\Lack or no technology		No	None
Nodes\Late to pick up children		No	None
Nodes\less disposable time		No	None
Nodes\Like minded people around		No	None
Nodes\Location convenience	LOCATION LONG HOURS	No	None
Nodes\Long hours High workload		No	None
Nodes\Long hours not possible		No	None
Nodes\Looking for role models		No	None
Nodes\Loss of identity	+Identity earnings	No	None
Nodes\Low earning for experience level		No	None
Nodes\Male dominated environment		No	None
Nodes\Manager suggested education training	ed / training	No	None
Nodes\Manager Support (pre children)	early	No	None
Nodes\Manager supported decision to leave		No	None
Nodes\Managing others after children		No	None
Nodes\Marriage break down		No	None
Nodes\Married 'young'		No	None
Nodes\Medical issues		No	None
Nodes\Mentoring supporting OTHERS		No	None
Nodes\mixture of childcare family and formal		No	None
Nodes\More confident second child	Confidence (growth)	No	None
Nodes\Motherhood tied to values		No	None
Nodes\motivated by making children proud		No	None
Nodes\Moved from part to full time		No	None
Nodes\Need to adapt and change		No	None
Nodes\Needing to be present for work		No	None
Nodes\Needing to put in time early on in career	Pressure to progress	No	None
Nodes\negative comments from work		No	None
Nodes\negative views of childcare from others	Childcare perceptions	No	None

Appendix J: Thematic analysis – final themes exported from NVIVO (chapter 6)

	A	B	E	F
20	05 CAREER PROGRESS		04/03/2021 16:36	SPB
21	What is Possible		29/04/2021 17:56	SPB
22	SACRIFICES		04/03/2021 17:00	SPB
23	CURRENT FUTURE OPTIONS		04/03/2021 17:00	SPB
24	LACK OF OPTIONS		04/03/2021 17:06	SPB
25	STAY OR LEAVE ORG		06/03/2021 10:49	SPB
40	FINANCIAL MOTIVATIONS		06/03/2021 10:51	SPB
49	CAREER PLANS		06/03/2021 10:53	SPB
54	IMPACT of motherhood ON CAREER		06/03/2021 10:53	SPB
62	ORG supporting DEVELOPMENT		08/03/2021 18:32	SPB
63	01 CHANGING ROLES IDENTITY		05/03/2021 09:37	SPB
64	Professional identity		05/03/2021 09:37	SPB
65	IDEALS		05/03/2021 09:37	SPB
68	PERCEPTIONS OF OTHERS		05/03/2021 09:37	SPB
72	ROLES worker or mother		05/03/2021 09:37	SPB
85	TRANSITIONS		08/03/2021 11:19	SPB
111	03 SUPPORT		06/03/2021 10:04	SPB
112	support to others		06/03/2021 10:04	SPB
113	PEERS COLLEAGUES		08/03/2021 13:21	SPB
115	MANAGER		08/03/2021 13:21	SPB
129	PARTNER		08/03/2021 13:21	SPB
133	ADVICE GUIDANCE FROM OTHERS		08/03/2021 13:21	SPB
134	CHILDCARE		08/03/2021 16:16	SPB
143	RTW support		22/03/2021 18:03	SPB
144	02 USING OWN RESOURCES		06/03/2021 10:54	SPB
145	DRIVE AMBITION		06/03/2021 10:54	SPB
147	CONFIDENCE		06/03/2021 10:54	SPB
149	STRENGTHS		06/03/2021 10:54	SPB
152	MOTIVATIONS (SELF)		06/03/2021 10:54	SPB
155	Supporting wellbeing		06/03/2021 11:05	SPB
159	Up to the individual		08/03/2021 11:26	SPB
160	04 ACCESSING FLEXIBLE WORK		06/03/2021 11:13	SPB
161	Working with colleagues e.g. share		06/03/2021 11:13	SPB
162	WFH		06/03/2021 11:13	SPB
164	Fighting the system		06/03/2021 11:13	SPB
165	ORGANISATIONAL		08/03/2021 13:18	SPB
181	PERSONAL		08/03/2021 16:40	SPB

Appendix K: Text of Quantitative survey (chapter 6)

Final version presented via Qualtrics

Study Title: Exploring career self-efficacy and employability
of working mothers and non-mothers

Section One:

About you

1. Your age
2. Level of academic qualifications you have achieved to date (tick highest level)
 - GCSE / O level
 - AS and A level
 - Certificates of Higher Education
 - Foundation degree
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Master's degree
 - Doctoral degree
3. My location
Country in which you are living and working _____

Section Two:

Confidence (general)

Response Format: 1 = Not at all true 2 = Hardly true 3 = Moderately true 4 = Exactly true

4. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.
5. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.
6. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.
7. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.
8. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.
9. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.
10. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.
11. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.
12. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.
13. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.

Confidence (occupational)

Response format: 1 = completely true, 6 = not at all true.

14. I can remain calm when facing difficulties in my job because I can rely on my abilities.
15. When I am confronted with a problem in my job, I can usually find several solutions.
16. Whatever comes my way in my job, I can usually handle it.
17. My past experiences in my job prepared me well for my occupational future.
18. I meet my goals that I set for myself in my job.
19. I feel prepared for most of the demands in my job.

Employability

Response format: Strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

20. Even if there was downsizing in this organisation I am confident that I would be retained.
21. My personal networks in this organisation help me in my career.
22. I am aware of the opportunities arising in this organisation even if they are different to what I do now.
23. The skills I have gained in my present job are transferable to other occupations outside this organisation.
24. I could easily retrain to make myself more employable elsewhere.
25. I have a good knowledge of opportunities for me outside of this organisation even if they are quite different to what I do now.
26. Among the people who do the same job as me, I am well respected in this organisation.
27. If I needed to, I could easily get another job like mine in a similar organisation.
28. I could easily get a similar job to mine in almost any organisation.
29. Anyone with my level of skills and knowledge, and similar job and organisational experience, will be highly sought after by employers.
30. I could get any job, anywhere, so long as my skills and experience were reasonably relevant.

Section three

A bit more about you / your work:

31. Current level of job/role which you would identify with:
 - Strategic decision-making
 - Senior management responsibility
 - Responsibility for work of others and organisational influence
 - First line management
 - Operational
 - Other, please state.....
32. Please state which of the following most describes your current working arrangements?
 - I work full time
 - I work part time
 - Other, please state.....
33. Please state what sector/industry you work in
 - Public Sector
 - Private Sector
 - Third Sector
 - Other, please state.....
34. Salary FTE annual gross income (i.e. before tax)

Q's in 11 steps starting from "up to £5,000," coded as 0; "£5,000 to £10,000," coded as 1; "£10,000 to £20,000," coded as 2; and then in equal steps to "£90,000 to £100,000," coded 10; and "above £100,000," coded as 11.

35. 'Do you have permission to delegate work?' yes/no;

36. 'Do you have temporary project responsibility?' yes/no;

37. 'Do you have an official leadership position?' yes/no

38. How long have you worked in your current organisation (__years __months)

39. 'What factors have you found to be supportive or unsupportive to your participation in the workplace? (examples may include manager, partner, family support, or working conditions).'

40. Do you currently have children?

- Yes (please go to next question)
- No (please go to next section)

41. Children's details

- I currently have number of children
- Child(ren)'s age(s)

I understand that once I complete this final question, I can no longer withdraw my consent and my responses cannot be removed. Thank you again for your participation.

42. Tick yes to complete and submit your final responses

Appendix L: Recruitment invitation for Quantitative survey (chapter 6)

Recruitment invitation

We would like to invite you to take part in a study which looks at the psychological experience of women in relation to their careers.

If you are a woman, in paid employment we would like you to complete this questionnaire.

We are interested in capturing the experience of working women in relation to two areas:

- How confident do you feel in using the skills you have in your workplace?
- How do you perceive your levels of employability, both inside and outside of your workplace?

Please note that Northumbria colleagues who participate in this study are expected to do so in their own time.

The project has been approved through the University Ethical Approval System (#16501) at Northumbria University.

More information is contained in the participant information sheet on the first page of the survey link:

<https://lnkd.in/drxY9bm>

The project has been approved through the University Ethical Approval System at Northumbria University. Full contact details and additional information contained within the study.



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

Study Title: Exploring career self-efficacy and employability of working women

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide it is important for you to read this leaflet so you understand why the study is being carried out and what it will involve.

Reading this leaflet, discussing it with others or asking any questions you might have will help you decide whether or not you would like to take part.

What is the Purpose of the Study?

We would like to invite you to take part in a study which looks at the psychological experience of women in the workplace. We are interested in the experience of working women in relation to how confident they feel in using the skills they have in the context of their role, decision making, and in their workplace as well as how employable they feel.

Previous research suggests that confidence in using one's skills, termed by researchers as self-efficacy, is related to both perceived and actual difficulties in making and implementing career decisions. This points to the importance of confidence in successful career decision making. However, we are not only interested in *measuring* confidence, but also considering the factors which may influence or contribute in some way towards this. Therefore, within the research we will ask for some additional information which research links to confidence in career decisions, such as level of education, role, salary and in the case of this research we also ask for basic information on number and age(s) of children. This is to explore the potential impact of motherhood on careers.

We hope that by understanding women's perceptions in this way we can further our understanding of the unique path of women's careers today.

Why have I been invited?

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire which asks a series of questions about yourself and your work. The questionnaire is self-report. The study will take around 30 minutes.

You can take part if you are a woman who is currently involved in some form of work outside of the home. In order to reduce the potential variability in the dataset so that we can better interpret our findings, we are only recruiting people who are currently engaged with paid work of some form (i.e. not voluntary and only work outside of the home).

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you whether you would like to take part in the study. I am giving you this information sheet to help you make that decision. If you do decide to take part, remember that you can stop being involved in the study without telling me why by not completing the online survey. You are completely free to decide whether or not to take part, or to take part and then leave the study before completion. Please note that once you have completed the final question on the survey, it is no longer possible to withdraw your responses as they are submitted anonymously (this is so I have no way of distinguishing participants).

What will happen if I take part?

You will be asked complete a short survey/questionnaire online, via a system called 'Qualtrics', anonymously which should take around 30 minutes.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

A disadvantage of taking part includes the time taken to do so.

There should not be any emotional discomfort with regards to the questions as the questions do not probe deeply into your psychological wellbeing or feelings. The questions will ask you to rate your perceptions of certain statements, none of which would be considered of a personal nature. They relate to career confidence and perceptions of employability.

We can reassure all participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of the research and you may withdraw at any point up to completing the last question, after which it is not possible to withdraw (see note above under 'do I have to take part').

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By taking part in the study you will be presented with an online questionnaire asking questions about your perceived confidence and employability which are factors which can influence careers decisions. By taking part and telling us your perceptions of confidence and perceived employability we can gather important information of factors which influence the careers of all women.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential and anonymous?

Yes. Your name will not be written on any of the data we collect, and your name will not appear in any reports or documents resulting from this study. The consent form you have authorised will be stored separately from your other data. The data collected from you in this study will be confidential.

How will my data be stored, and how long will it be stored for?

All electronic data will be stored only on password-protected university systems accessible only to the researcher and supervisor. All data will be stored in accordance with university guidelines and the Data Protection Act (2018).

What categories of personal data will be collected and processed in this study?

We will ask you for your age, whether or not you have a child or children, how many and their ages. We will ask about your current level of academic qualification, and your current working arrangements (e.g. full or part time work) and which sector you work in. We will also ask what your current level of responsibility is in your role. We will ask for information on salary based on a scale presented. Many of these questions will have a number of options to choose from for ease of completion.

What will happen to the results of the study and could personal data collected be used in future research?

The general findings might be reported in a scientific journal or presented at a research conference, however, the data will be anonymised and so the data you have provided will not be personally identifiable.

We can provide you with a summary of the findings from the study if you email the researcher at the address listed below.

Who is Organising and Funding the Study?

Northumbria University

Who has reviewed this study?

The project has been approved through the University Ethical Approval system (#16501) at Northumbria University.

GDPR information:

The legal basis for the study's personal data processing is that the research is being conducted in the public interest, and/or is necessary for scientific and historical research purposes. You have the right to access your data upon request. Contact the Information Commissioner's Office for further information, and/or complaints about the University's processing of personal data: <https://ico.org.uk/>

Contact for further information:

Researcher email: Mrs Susie Phillips-Baker

Susie.phillips-baker@northumbria.ac.uk

PhD Supervisor email: Dr Vicki Elsey vicki.elsey@northumbria.ac.uk

Name and contact details of the Data Protection Officer at Northumbria University: Duncan James (dp.officer@northumbria.ac.uk).

Appendix N: Participant Consent form for Quantitative survey (chapter 6)



Faculty of Health & Life Sciences

Consent Form (online)

If you would like to take part in this study, please read the statement below and tick 'I agree'

I understand the nature of the study, and what is required from me. I understand that after I participate, I will receive a debrief providing me with information about the study and contact details for the researcher. I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time up until I have completed the questionnaire, without having to give a reason for withdrawing, and without prejudice. I agree to provide information to the investigator and understand that my contribution will remain confidential. I also consent to the retention of this data under the condition that any subsequent use also be restricted to research projects that have gained ethical approval from Northumbria University.

I agree

Appendix O: Debrief sheet for Quantitative survey participants (chapter 6)



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

Participant code:

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF

Name of Researcher: Mrs Susie Phillips-Baker

Name of Supervisor (if relevant): Dr Vicki Elsey

Project Title: Exploring career self-efficacy and employability of working mothers and non-mothers

1. What was the purpose of the project?

Many things influence the career decisions of working women, including levels of confidence in utilising skills and experience. This study aims to measure the beliefs about confidence and perceptions of employability for working women including those with children, to establish any patterns or relationships between those factors.

This is important as we know that research points to a relative disadvantage in career progression for women in the workplace and a potential 'penalty' for working mothers with caregiving responsibilities. This includes but is not limited to a pay penalty; other disadvantages include career continuation and occupational status penalties. This study will also look at perceived levels of employability for working women.

We looked at how employable women perceive themselves to be, within and outside of their own organisation. Existing research proposes that working mothers may report higher levels of internal employability compared to the external employability, and that this may differ to working non-mothers.

We also asked for limited biographical information which the research will consider alongside the above as additional influencing factors. This includes some measures of career success including level of responsibility and salary.

2. How will I find out about the results?

Once the study has been completed and the data analysed, approximately 6-8 weeks after taking part. Therefore, after this time you may request the researcher email you a general summary of the results. This is only available by request, as we will not have any contact details in order to do contact participants otherwise.

Contact details of researcher: Susie Phillips-Baker Susie.phillips-baker@northumbria.ac.uk

3. If I change my mind and wish to withdraw the information I have provided, how do I do this?

As stated in the information sheet and in the survey itself, once you have fully completed the questionnaire, there is no way for the researcher to withdraw your responses from the study. This is because no identifying information is captured and so it would be impossible to find and identify your specific responses.

The data collected in this study may also be published in scientific journals or presented at conferences. Information and data gathered during this research study will only be available to the research team identified in the information sheet. Should the research be presented or published in any form, all data will be anonymous (i.e. your personal information or data will not be identifiable).

All information and data gathered during this research will be stored in line with the Data Protection Act and will be destroyed 36 months following the conclusion of the study (this is because it forms part of a PhD which will be assessed in 24-36 months. If the research is published in a scientific journal it may be kept for longer before being destroyed. During that time the data may be used by members of the research team only for purposes appropriate to the research question, but at no point will your personal information or data be revealed. Insurance companies and employers will not be given any individual's personal information, nor any data provided by them, and nor will we allow access to the police, security services, social services, relatives, or lawyers, unless forced to do so by the courts.

If you wish to receive feedback about the findings of this research study, then please contact the researcher, Susie Phillips-Baker at susie.phillips-baker@northumbria.ac.uk.

This study and its protocol have received full ethical approval from Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee. If you require confirmation of this, or if you have any concerns or worries concerning this research, or if you wish to register a complaint, please contact the Chair of this Committee, Professor Nick Neave stating the title of the research project and the name of the researcher: nick.neave@northumbria.ac.uk

Appendix P: Excerpts of content analysis from open-text survey question (chapter 6)

Figure P1: Sample from Unsupportive factors for women with children

	A	B	C	D
1	NO	UNSUPP (MOTHERS)	CHILDYDYN	
2	9	The cost of childcare for both children (the 15/30 funded hours do not cover the full hourly cost of childcare, with my minder needing to charge a 'top-up' fee. I'm actually paying out nearly my entire earnings on childcare.	Yes	
3	14	unsupportive manager	Yes	
4	31	The team due to severe adversities. Management are more challenging than the guys we support. They are not active o the shop floor, work in the office monday to friday 8-3 for £33k a year. we work 60+hrs a week for £8.21 an hour	Yes	
5	63	The overall management within the company. Nobody has been trained properly therefor no one is doing the right job and causing a lot of staff to walk out, piling a lot of pressure on other employees.	Yes	
6	83	Senior manager unsupportive	Yes	
7	101a	Family (ex partner, elderly parents, etc.) all non supportive - because I work from home I am expected to drop everything work related at any time to prioritise family issues.	Yes	
8	101b	Constant interruptions also.	Yes	
9	117	Managers have been unsupportive in the past .	Yes	
10	125	fitting round school hours can be a problem	Yes	
11	126	lack of flexibility is an issue and appreciation of family life eg meetings scheduled for 9am or 4pm that tend to over run	Yes	
12	132	My work place does not support me with flexibility even though I have health problems.	Yes	
13	135a	unsupportive: job cuts	Yes	
14	135	funding constraints	Yes	
15	138a	Unsupportive factors Sometimes childcare can be unreliable	Yes	
16	138b	Sometimes unable to help cover other peoples shifts which can lead to slight tensions between staff members	Yes	
17	144	Sometimes the working conditions are not supportive as we can be at risk , my workplace needs to be made safer.	Yes	
18	146a	childcare accommodations lacking.	Yes	
19	146b	volunteer worker support lacking - my job relies heavily on having volunteers give their time	Yes	
		location unsuitability - the location I mainly work from lacks basic things that would be helpful - ie. an office, a child-		

Figure P2: Unsupportive factors for women without children

	A	B	C
1	NO	UNSUPP (No children)	CHILDYN
5	4a	Unsupportive: University timetables,	No
10	4b	Lecturers,	No
11	4c	Health	No
12	17a	Unsupportive: director (in expecting me to do too much)	No
13	17b	, long working hours with no remuneration for overtime because of being salaried	No
14	25a	my pay and	No
15	25b	some colleagues are very unsupportive.	No
18	26	Promotion is not good	No
26	29	However I was diagnosed autistic last year at 43 years old. I have always struggled socially in work and with anxiety and had difficulty meeting targets.	No
27	30a	unsupportive: dismissive seniors,	No
28	30b	blame culture	No
29	37a	My partner is less supportive as he knows I can do better (change industry and get a better paid, more respected job)	No
30	37b	Family are somewhat supportive but are happy for me to move away from the industry and try something new	No
31	37c	Working conditions are somewhat supportive	No
32	39	General management could improve with their approach to people below them, you feel like a number rather than a person. They can be quite harsh, and dismissive to members of staff.	No
33	40	My manager is very demanding and picky which makes my job more stressful but also will prepare me for future managers who might be the same	No
34	42	I have found sometimes my ideas are ignored or laughed at until one of the men in the office says the exact same thing	No
35	50	Working conditions could be better	No
36	51	Working conditions are a negative	No
37	58	Manager and HR, bad management/understanding of my disability	No
38	59	Unsupportive - Health	No
39	62	company is generally unsupportive regarding any problems you have outside of work.	No

←
▶
UNSUPP Ch
UNSUPP NoCh
SUPP NoCh
SUPP Ch
⊕

Ready

Figure P3: Supportive factors for women with children

A	B	C
NO	SUPPORT	CHILDYN
1	My manager and my co-workers	No
2	The working conditions are great, the hours i work aren't too exhausting.	No
3	im not sure	No
4a	Immediate family,	No
4b	partner	No
5a	My family help me	No
5b	team leaders	No
5c	managers	No
5d	fellow colleagues.	No
8a	I have a very supportive line manager who I can openly speak to and she is very supportive of me.	No
8b	My working environment is full of like minded people so there are rarely any disagreements	No
11a	Management	No
11b	Wages	No
11c	Customers	No
12	flexibility	No
15a	Colleagues	No
15b	partner	No
15c	family,	No
15d	flexible working hours	No
16	Organizational skills	No

Figure P4: Supportive factors for women without children

A	B	C
NO	SUPPORT	CHILDYN
2 224	I am not in work at this time and I am retraining to be self employed. I answered the questions based on a previous job I had in my 30s. The same response would also have been accurate for a different job I had in my 20s.	Yes
3 311e	a good working environment.	Yes
4 372a	a lot of help needed from partner	Yes
5 495j	champions,	Yes
5 325c	family support,	Yes
7 484b	long experience	Yes
3 362b	My family have been my rock.	Yes
9 406	I have been supported by clients who are from a similar background, e.g. women with children	Yes
0 100c	My personality	
1 200b	(Manager) She strongly advocates for me and requests pay raises on my behalf without me asking.	Yes
2 86c	A good culture of sharing ideas at work.	
3 86b	A good partner that listens.	
4 443d	a healthy family	Yes
5 437b	ability to determine own career path and specialism	Yes
6 387d	ability to have accountability and plan my days to suit me	Yes

Figure P5: Excerpt from analysis of Supportive factors (mothers) – ‘Meaning/Interest’ theme

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
NO	SUPPORT	CHILDYN						
422e	Doing challenging work with good variety	Yes						
422d	Doing purposeful work	Yes						
503b	interesting work,	Yes						
381b	Type of role	Yes						
411c	Nature of work	Yes						
23	having support to follow your dream	Yes						
44	Positive influences in my life	Yes						
369d	vocational job	Yes						
176e	Working for a prestigious well known sports team.	Yes						

Encouragement general | Organisational | Environment of equality | Mentor champion | **Interest Meaning** | Autonomy | Being self employed | Partner | ...

Figure P6: Excerpt from analysis of Unsupportive factors (mothers) – ‘Work-family balance’ theme

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
NO	UNSUPP	CHILDYN					
349b	Pulls between family and work	Yes					
341d	push-pull of family and work	Yes					
445a	Unsupportive: busy family life, unsupportive	Yes					
318a	the nature of the shifts and demands of the role, exacerbated by public spending cuts and reductions in staff, meant more and more was asked of me, which made it challenging to balance family life with a career.	Yes					
170a	Life work balance	Yes					

Mat leave | Discr. or perceptions | Travel | Partner | Working time | Working conditions | Org Culture | Colleagues | **WFB** | Family | Manager(s) | ...

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