

**DOES THE PROVISION OF FULL DAY CARE IMPROVE THE  
QUALITY OF LIFE FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS?**

**BY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study sought to explore and examine if the provision of full day care improves the quality of life for children and their parents. Owing to the effects of the Celtic Tiger, life in Ireland has changed considerably over the past five to ten years. Because of the booming economy there are now 60.8% of women employed in the workforce. This means many changes for children, parents and families.

Findings in the literature review are based on international studies. The researcher utilised both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies for the study. She interviewed 31 respondents; 27 childcare managers; 3 politicians and the chairperson of a childcare committee. Furthermore, 325 questionnaires were completed in a survey by working parents in the statutory and voluntary sectors in and around Sligo town and in two childcare facilities in Letterkenny, Co Donegal.

Babies as young as 4 months are being cared for in childcare facilities from 6.45am until 6pm daily, 5 days per week. Some children are spending up to 11 hours per day in childcare facilities. The study has not categorically concluded that full day care is either positive or negative for children. Childcare facilities are providing good quality childcare encompassing various services; however, 25 out of 27 childcare managers reported to the researcher that they would not leave their child in full day care.

Parents are finding it difficult to manage work life balance. Health dominated quality of life issues. Two hundred and thirty five (235) parents reported being stressed. The study also found that 315 working parents feel that the government is not doing enough to support working parents. On a positive note, 241 parents said they are happy in general with the quality of life for them, their family and their children.

In addition, the researcher has identified a number of recommendations for future changes in policy and further study.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To Kevin, Érin, Killian, Dónal, Séorsa, Iarlaith and Bébhinn, many thanks.

## DECLARATION

I hereby certify this material which I now submit for the assessment of the programme of study leading to award of Masters Degree by Research is entirely my own work and has not been taken from others, save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of this study.

Signed: Maureen O' Hara

Date: 1st July 2009.



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# CHAPTER: ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ireland has witnessed many social and economic changes over the past five to ten years. We are the second wealthiest country in the world, next to Japan, but it can be argued that we have more social problems now than ever before. One does not need to be a statistician to tell from the media and even our own experience of life that people may be cash-rich but they have become time-poor.

One of the factors in our new monetary wealth has been an un-remitting increase in employment. A major change in recent years is that women are needed in the workforce, and the Central Statistics Office (CSO 2007a) Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS): Quarter 4 figures show that there were 60.8% of women in the workforce then.

However, many of these new workers, especially women, are parents who may be juggling their roles, attempting to achieve work life balance and quality of life, between childcare, work and leisure. One response by the parents has been to use professional childcare facilities such as full day care or home-based child-minders. The consequence is that children, even babies, are in non-parental care for major portions of the day. But while some parents may rush, does childhood lose or gain from this arrangement? The fleeting nature of childhood makes it imperative to make the best possible use of it, to ensure optimal development and as an investment in a future well balanced society. A parallel can be made with the children affected by another modern phenomenon:

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA 2005: 7) quotes Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral:

Many things we need can wait, the child cannot.  
Now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, his mind  
Is being developed.  
To him we cannot say tomorrow, his name is today.

This may be emotive language, but a poet can encapsulate a dilemma in a few words.

This study was designed to investigate the effects of some aspects of these changes on children and families in and around Sligo town as well as families/children availing of childcare facilities in two childcare facilities in Letterkenny. Anecdotally, these areas may be considered representative of much of modern Ireland, being medium sized towns with active economies. Findings from the study may provide useful information for future societal planning.

## **1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION – HYPOTHESIS**

The main research question posed in this study is:

*'Does the provision of full day care improve the quality of life for children and their parents?'*

Evidence to accept or reject this hypothesis will be based on the analysis of findings from the data accumulated by the research.

Research questions were formulated after conducting the literature review, following four aspects; under each of the four sections the following main themes will be explored:

- Quality of Life
  - What are the tangible changes on the quality of lives for families when parents of young children are in the labour force, thus requiring provision of full day care for young children?
  
- Quality Provision
  - What are the tangible measures taken in Ireland in relation to quality provision in early childhood care and education?
  
- Attachment
  - What can be observed with regard to attachment for children when they are in childcare because their parents are in the workforce?

- Childcare Issues
  - In relation to the provision of full day care for young children, what is viewed as best practice by researchers, parents and childcare managers?

## **1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Paid childcare is relatively new in Ireland. There appears to be no study as yet comparing quality of life for children and parents before the advent of paid childcare as against its widespread use and availability now. The past five to ten years have brought many changes in Irish society, the main change being that women are in the workforce and children are being cared for in childcare settings. This is very new to Ireland because the norm before this was that the father was the main breadwinner and the mother cared for the children at home. This has been made possible for working parents now owing to the amount of childcare facilities and services available, whereas in the past there was very little of this apart from in some cases wealthy working parents may have employed an au pair to care for their children. The objectives below aim to investigate these changes:

- To describe the development of social, political, and economic change that has recently beset Ireland since the advent of the Celtic Tiger years, resulting in many changes in the quality of life for children and their families
- To establish current quality of life markers
- To identify threats to quality of life
- To identify possible solutions to these threats
- To show the developments and supports for childcare in Ireland and internationally
- To document the findings from international studies in relation to the effects of long-term day care on children
- To establish current patterns in non-parental childcare
- To establish perceived benefits/ threats to quality of life from the point of view of parents and professionals

- To compile a list of recommendations re full day care from various sources which could be implemented in order to facilitate a better quality of life for children and their parents in the future
- Should the main hypothesis be rejected – to make recommendations which could be followed up at local and national government with the view to alerting policy makers about the views and wishes of working parents.

### **1.3 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH**

While researching for this thesis I discovered that there was relatively little information about the unprecedented changes in Ireland, which are affecting working parents. There appears to be very little print material as yet. I have listened to radio and television programmes where parents are interviewed and their opinions are expressed across the airways and there have been numerous articles written by journalists in the newspapers about working parents and childcare. However, I found no written accounts in the Irish context from working parents or from the childcare providers who work at the coal face on a daily basis. This was why I was interested in obtaining the experiences of working parents and that of childcare providers who work with the children. For this reason I feel that this study subject warrants attention.

### **1.4 VARIABLES**

Variables that could influence the study are gender, education and socio-economic backgrounds. For example, anecdotal and scientific evidence suggests that it is mainly women who care for children in Ireland, either in their own homes or in professional childcare facilities. Because most women in Ireland are attaining a third level education this means that they will aspire to greater choice of employment, and to utilising their qualifications after leaving college, for instance, in the second quarter of 2005, almost 34% of employed persons aged 25-64 reported having a third level qualification, compared to a figure of just under 30% three years previously. Almost 40% of employed females aged 25-64 held a third level qualification while the comparable figure for males was just under 30% (CSO 2006 Quarterly National Household Survey: Educational Attainments).

Numerous studies show that children from all socio-economic backgrounds do really well from pre-school care and education programmes in their areas.

Efforts were made to sample a wide group of subjects to minimise the variables.

## **1.5 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

While visiting the crèches and interviewing the childcare workers in connection with my undergraduate thesis, I became aware of the different aspects of childcare and was informed about full day care, which was in operation in some of the crèches that I visited. I was taken aback to discover the long hours which children spent in these facilities.

This gave me the impetus to investigate and examine how full day care was working and get the views on it both from the childcare managers and the working parents who were leaving their children into the various childcare facilities in and around Sligo town as well as two crèches that I visited to interview the childcare managers in Letterkenny, Co Donegal.

## **1.6 METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW**

Firstly, I engaged in secondary research by conducting an extensive literature review. I was guided by the following themes:

- Quality of Life
  - What are the tangible measures on the quality of lives for families when parents of young children are in the labour force, thus requiring provision of full day care for young children?
  
- Quality Provision
  - What are the tangible measures taken in Ireland in relation to quality provision in early childhood care and education?
  
- Attachment
  - What are the tangible measures with regard to attachment for children when their parents are in the workforce?

- Childcare issues
  - What are the tangible measures of recent changes in society concerning childcare, in relation to the provision of full day care for young children?

I accessed books, journals, the Internet, Radio and Television programmes as well as the print media in the form of reading the daily newspapers, for example, the Irish Times amongst others. However, the media references have been kept to a minimum because of the academic nature of the study.

Following on, I employed primary qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews based on the themes above. To enable this, questionnaires were compiled to be used as the basis for the interviews with the managers of the childcare facilities.

In addition to this, primary research in the form of questionnaires was used in order to acquire information from the working parents who were leaving their child/children in full day care in the childcare facilities in both towns.

I analysed the interviews by content analysis. Then they were cleaned and coded and the results entered on a computer package – SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists).

Questionnaires were cleaned and coded before being entered onto SPSS. The results/findings of both the interviews and questionnaires, showing tables and pie charts are displayed in chapter four – Data Analysis/Findings and Discussions, in parts one and two respectively.

## **1.7 DEFINITIONS**

**Quality of Life:** For children and their parents quality of life is about concerns about inequality, environmental degradation, the breakdown of the social structure of society, and investment in future generations which give rise to measuring quality of life with local indicators (Greenwood, cited in Smeeding and Rainwater, 2004:334). Also, quality of life is an examination of influences upon the goodness



and meaning in life, as well as people's happiness and well-being (University of Toronto website).

**Work life Balance:** For children and their parents 'work-life balance' denotes that an individual can manage both work and other aspects of their life, such as the domestic or family sphere, without conflict or without the opposition of one domain to the other. Work-life balance implies that managing one's time is like balancing a scale – the more time one puts on one side of the scale the less will be available on the other. It does not mean equal time spent in different domains but rather, depending on individual circumstances and context, balance points to the ability to fulfil roles in each arena Blyston *et al* (2006:1-2). Also, work life balance consists of the implementation of working arrangements and policies, which assist workers in combining employment with other aspects of their lives. Employers can benefit from these policies too as they can help to develop a more committed and productive workforce (Work life Balance website).

**Quality Provision:** As regards childcare quality provision is neither some unattainable holy grail, nor something that once captured can be preserved. Quality is dynamic and will change as new information emerges alongside new technologies, new policies and new kinds of childcare and childcare professionals. Also innovative approaches to work with young children will always push the boundaries of what we perceive to be 'quality'. The challenge for all those involved in extending these boundaries is how we can truly reflect the views of all those whose 'voices' are not usually heard in examining, describing, evaluating and judging what is of 'quality' in early years contexts Abbott and Langton (2006: 69-78).

**Full Day Care:** full day care is the provision of a structured day care service for children for more than 3.5 hours per day supervised by competent personnel. Full day care includes crèches and nurseries, according to National Economic and Social Forum (NESF, report: 31, 2005:63).

**Childcare:** Childcare refers to day care facilities and services for pre-school children and school going children out of school hours. It includes services offering care, education and socialisation opportunities for children to the benefit of children,

parents, employers and the wider community. Thus services such as naíonraí (Irish-speaking playgroups), day care services, crèches, play groups, childminding and after-school groups are included, but schools (primary, secondary and special) and residential centres for children are excluded (NESF report: 31, 2005:63).

**Attachment:** For children and their parents attachment is an enduring emotional connection between people that produces a desire for continual contact as well as feeling of distress during separation (Berger, 2001 cited in Catherwood and Gillibrand (2004:82). Attachment is the process by which infants form strong, affectional ties with their caregivers (Meece and Daniels, 2008: 75).

## **1.8 OUTLINE OF STRUCTURE**

This thesis is based on a six (6)-chapter structure. Here I will illustrate briefly the contents of the remaining five (5) chapters.

### **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

A review of past and current literature is examined with a view to critiquing and analysing substantive theories and perspectives while being aware of gaps in current research. The chapter portrays the various issues affecting and surrounding childcare in Ireland, Europe and internationally, and also quality of life issues and the provision of quality childcare relating to modern Irish parenting.

### **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

This chapter displays for the reader, a complete assessment of all the available research tools. I outline in detail the procedures used in employing Qualitative and Quantitative techniques in the study.

### **Chapter 4 – Results - Data Analysis**

In this chapter the most recurring themes are explored from both the questionnaires and the interviews. Data referring to the themes was interpreted and entered into SPSS 15.0 where pie and bar charts were produced showing graphical representations of the themes.

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

This chapter will give an analysis of all the data. There are personal testimonials in excerpts from interviews conducted with childcare managers in the childcare facilities as well as quotes from working parents who filled out the questionnaires. The discussion attempts to find the answers to the research questions and subsidiary questions.

Findings from the interviews and the questionnaires were corroborated and collated with research found while conducting the literature review, thus, culminating in the conclusions and recommendations.

## **Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Recommendations**

As stated, from the analysis of results in chapter four and discussions in chapter five, conclusions are outlined in the final chapter and recommendations are listed and highlighted with a view to implementing policy change as well as providing a baseline for the possibility of further research and study in this area.

### **1.9 DELIMITATIONS AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS**

In researching this topic, there was a limited amount of information available in Ireland which meant that there was nothing there that I could compare this survey to in the past, for example, to explore if progress was being made or if stagnation is still the norm in current policy where relevant.

Furthermore, in doing the field work I observed that working parents did not have much spare time to sit down and fill in the questionnaires, and the same could be said about the childcare managers who are very busy in their day to day role managing their childcare facilities.

### **1.9 CONCLUSION**

Based on my assumptions, I have selected what I think are the most important aspects of interest in this area of study. The reason I chose these is that I see and hear every day about the changes in Irish society and in the economy. I realise that these changes

impact on us all and in particular on the children who are the most vulnerable because of their developmental stage.

This thesis will show the results of this study and may act as a precedent in order to access and compare replication of these changes in different geographical areas of Ireland in the future.

Recommendations are made in order to facilitate direction in this area for social policy and/or for more in-depth research on this topic.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this literature review is to explore, interpret and reflect on information previously researched; it presents the current state of knowledge by highlighting important research in the field, with the view of informing the current study.

In conducting this literature review, the researcher wants to

- 1) Describe the development of social, political, and economic change that has recently beset Ireland since the advent of the Celtic Tiger years, resulting in many changes in the quality of life for parents, children and their families
- 2) To show the developments and supports for childcare in Ireland and internationally
- 3) To document the findings from international studies in relation to the effects on children of long-term care and
- 4) To compile a list of recommendations from various sources which could be implemented in order to facilitate a better quality of life for parents, children and families in the future.

Under each of the four sections the following main themes will be explored:

- Quality of Life
  - What are the tangible changes on the quality of lives for families when parents of young children are in the labour force, thus requiring provision of full day care for young children?
- Quality Provision
  - What are the tangible measures taken in Ireland in relation to quality provision in early childhood care and education?
- Attachment
  - What can be observed with regard to attachment for children when they are in childcare because their parents are in the workforce?

- Childcare Issues
  - In relation to the provision of full day care for young children, what is viewed as best practice by researchers, parents and childcare managers?

The importance of the research is aptly summed up in the following quotation:

*'The Children are everyone's heirs, everyone's business, everyone's future'* (Piercey, 1887:183, cited in Crompton, 1990:117).

One limitation to the literature review is that, apart from print and other media reports, there are very few peer reviewed or scholarly reports pertaining to this topic as yet in Ireland.

The following gives a short preview of the main issues discussed in the literature review:

Quality of Life: For children and their parents quality of life is about concerns about inequality, environmental degradation, the breakdown of the social structure of society, and investment in future generations which give rise to measuring quality of life with local indicators (Greenwood; cited in Smeeding and Rainwater, 2004:334). Also, quality of life is an examination of influences upon the goodness and meaning in life, as well as people's happiness and well-being (University of Toronto website). Research on quality of life from Canada shows a Report Card (2002) which was the outcome of the Quality of Life Indicators Project, which brought together 350 Canadians in 40 different dialogue groups in 21 towns and cities across Canada to produce a prototype set of quality of life indicators (Quality of Life in Canada: Citizen's Report Card, 2002).

Work life balance: For children and their parents 'work-life balance' denotes that an individual can manage both work and other aspects of their life, such as the domestic or family sphere, without conflict or without the opposition of one domain to the other. It is becoming difficult to attain, as parents appear to be spending very little time with their children. According to Finlay (2007a: 3) quoting from the survey *Listening to Parents, Listening to Children – The Barnardo's Childhood Poll*: 'In

some cases, where both parents were working full time they expressed less satisfaction with the time they had to be with their children'

This leads onto several other questions for example, are the parents compensating the children for lack of time spent with them by giving them toys, or extra curricular activities while at the childcare facility? Because society has changed so rapidly over the 10 years this is a topic that warrants closer attention.

Full Day Care: is the provision of a structured day care service for children for more than 5 hours per day and which may include a sessional pre-school service hours per day supervised by competent personnel (Department of Health and Children 2006a).

Childcare: refers to day care facilities and services for pre-school children and school going children out of school hours. It includes services offering care, education and socialisation opportunities for children to the benefit of children, parents, employers and the wider community. Thus many services such as naíonraí, day care services, crèches, play groups, childminding and after-school groups are included, but schools (primary, secondary and special) and residential centres for children are excluded (NESF report, 2005:63).

Quality Provision: As regards childcare, quality provision is neither some unattainable holy grail, nor something that once captured can be preserved. Quality is dynamic and will change as new information emerges alongside new technologies, new policies and new kinds of childcare and childcare professionals. Also innovative approaches to work with young children will always push the boundaries of what we perceive to be 'quality'. The challenge for all those involved in extending these boundaries is how we can truly reflect the views of all those whose 'voices' are not usually heard in examining, describing, evaluating and judging what is of 'quality' in early years contexts Abbott and Langton (2006: 69-78). When children require paid childcare, parents may worry about their children having attachments to the childcare workers.

Attachment: For children and their parents attachment is an enduring emotional connection between people that produces a desire for continual contact as well as feeling of distress during separation (Berger, 2001 cited in Catherwood and

Gillibrand (2004:82). Attachment is the process by which infants form strong, affectional ties with their caregivers (Meece and Daniels, 2008: 75). All these issues and more are discussed under section 2.1.

## **2.1 QUALITY OF LIFE**

### **2.1.1 WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS ON THE QUALITY OF LIVES OF FAMILIES WHEN PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN ARE IN THE LABOUR FORCE, THUS REQUIRING PROVISION OF FULL DAY CARE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?**

Lauer (1998:28) asserts: ‘there are numerous contradictions in our society that create conditions incompatible with our desired quality of life. All of us are affected, though some suffer far more than others. Because of the diminished quality of life, we define these contradictions and the conditions they create as social problems’.

Sustained economic growth in the United States and other industrialised countries has led to renewed interest in quality of life as well as income levels. Economics once assumed that educational and health needs would be addressed as a by-product of income growth, but cross-country comparisons show that their correlation to income levels is weaker than one would expect. Concerns about inequality, environmental degradation, the breakdown of the social structure of society, and investment in future generations give rise to the need for measuring quality of life with local indicators (Smeeding and Rainwater, 2004:334).

In Ireland, chapter one of the National Development Plan 2007-2013, *National Investment Priorities 2007-2013 – A Better Quality of Life for All* (2007: 29), they discuss that this National Development Plan 2007-2013 sets out the economic and social investment priorities needed to realise the vision of a better quality of life for all. This better quality of life will be achieved by supporting the continued development of a dynamic and international economy and society with a high commitment to international competitiveness, social justice and environmental sustainability (2007:29).



In addition, well-being is a central feature used in quality of life research and it links in to family support and early childhood education and care. The *Ready, Steady, Play! A National Play Policy* (2004) was conducted by the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC). This National Play Policy covers the years 2004-2008. It raises awareness of the importance of play and contributes to the expansion of public play facilities over the implementation period. The process leading to the publication of *Ready, Steady, Play!* started when almost 2,500 children were involved in the consultation on the National Children's Strategy. Children were asked about their views on Ireland – whether they thought it was a good place for them to grow up in, what was good about it and what would make it better. Their responses identified play and recreation as a major quality of life issue for them: they commented on how they had nowhere to play, how if they tried to play, adults often stopped them, and how adults did not realise how important play was to them. This was an excellent example of how consulting with children can yield unexpected results: play and recreation was not identified so strongly as an issue by the adults involved in the consultation process, but it was the major concern for children. This National Play Policy is for them – they identified a gap in public policy and the launch of *Ready, Steady, Play!* was the first step towards closing that gap and it should lead to an enhanced quality of life for children and their parents.

Furthermore, in the US, each year since 1977, the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics has published a report called '*America's Children, Key National Indicators of Well-being*'. The report highlights among other issues, critical areas of child well-being and gives the American people an annual report card on how the country's children are doing (Federal Interagency Forum website). This can be seen as an example of openness and best practice.

### **2.1.2 STUDIES ON QUALITY OF LIFE**

Bronfenbrenner (1979) placed child development in an ecological perspective. His ground-breaking work combined aspects of sociology and developmental psychology and laid an enduring foundation for future approaches. The relationships between individuals and their environments are viewed as "mutually shaping." Bronfenbrenner saw the individual's experience "as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like

a set of Russian dolls' (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 22). In studying human development, one has to see within, beyond, and "across" how the several systems interact (family, workplace, and economy). The study of the ability of families to access and manage resources across these systems would appear to be a logical extension of his investigations. His four interlocking systems that shape individual development are *The micro-system; The meso-system; The exo-system* and *The macro-system*.

As discussed by Fallon (2005), Irish families and times are changing. Family life is unique, depending on all the variables which any given family experiences. Up until now there has been very little information available on relationships within families over the course of the last century. However a new study has been launched (September, 2008) by the Family Support Agency under the auspices of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The two-year study aims to capture the first comprehensive picture of family life in Ireland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Dr Margaret Fine-Davis is leading the study. The agency is also funding the ESRI to carry out a study on trends and patterns in family formation and breakdown, based on data from the Central Statistics Office over the past 20 years (Family Support Agency website).

In quality of life research on children and adults Dannerbeck *et al* (2004:23) did an assessment of life satisfaction of children and adults in the Netherlands. They discuss that in the past psychologists issued calls for greater attention to a science of positive psychology, which focuses on studying conditions that promote optimal human and societal development. Such a science, along with the creation of prevention and intervention programmes informed by expanded scientific framework, is expected to improve the quality of life for all individuals, not just individuals who are at risk or who already demonstrate psychopathological conditions. Based on the assessment ten conclusions appear warranted regarding children and youth (ages 8-11).

Dannerbeck *et al* (2004:23) noted that additional research is needed to specify the precise meaning and boundaries of the life satisfaction construct. However, the study has shown that as well as being useful with adults' life, satisfaction is a meaningful and important variable for children and adolescents (from about age 8) as well as adults.

In discussing *The Happiest Country in the World?* Keohane and Kuhling (2006) discuss that in November 2004 the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) published the findings of a survey measuring the quality of life in 11 countries. The Republic of Ireland featured as the happiest country (Keohane and Kuhling 2006:32). However, they also discuss depression, the incidence of suicide and deliberate self-harm and related problems in contemporary Ireland. They note how the ‘melancholy spirit of the Celtic Tiger is a consequence of Ireland’s collision culture from the experience of accelerated modernisation and the persistence of older social forms, while higher values and metaphysical ideals are destabilised and uncertain’ (Keohane and Kuhling 2006: 40).

Furthermore a study about quality of life in Ireland was conducted by Clinch *et al* (2007) at UCD and titled ‘*Understanding and Enhancing Quality of Life in Ireland*’. It highlighted the following points:

It now takes at least €60,000 to satisfy the average household

- Men are less satisfied than women
- Dubliners are “significantly less happy” because of traffic and the associated stresses of congestion

This survey gives us a snapshot of some aspects of life in Ireland. It highlights the dissatisfaction with long commutes to work and the happiness gained from owning your own house. However this means that in order to aspire to this both parents will have to work. A study, for example by Gornick, Heron, and Eisenbrey (2007) shows that in Europe and internationally in most households, both parents go to work:

During the past 25 years, the workforce participation of women has increased substantially throughout the industrialized countries that make up the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In the United States, for example, the employment rate of women increased from 47.5% in 1979 to 56.0% in 2004. Currently, in most OECD countries, the majority of couples with children have both parents in the workforce; single mothers' employment rates generally exceed those of married mothers. As a result, parents throughout these countries are struggling to balance the demands of employment with the needs of their families. Policy makers have been forced to tackle a range of problems: insufficient parental time spent with their children; excessive stress on working parents; gender imbalances in the workplace and in caregiving; and financial burdens imposed by the high cost of quality child care (Gornick, *et al*, 2007: 1-10).

### **2.1.3 DUAL EARNER PARENTS**

A review of the literature shows that the general trend in the EU is that both adults in households composed of couples are in paid work regardless of whether they have children or not. The employment patterns of families with children reveal a combination of one-earner families, dual-career, and male full-time/female part-time arrangements. In some member states such as Portugal and Finland, the dual-career family dominates the labour market (Larsen and Hadlow, March 2003).

Quality of life in Ireland is changing and has changed greatly in the past 10 years. Nowadays, in most families both parents have to work for economic reasons. Current figures show that 60% of children under 15 have a mother who works outside the home (CSO 2007b) Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS): Quarter 4). In addition, 23% of children under the age of 15 are now in lone parent families (CSO 2006b Commentary). For many years, the father was the main breadwinner in the Irish household. However because both parents now work outside the home, there is a great demand for childcare. Childcare is a dominant issue in Ireland; for example, there is a question of demand, funding from the government, availability, access, cost, standards, quality and qualifications of childcare staff. Because of the demographics and increasing population, it will be an issue for many years to come.

Ireland has the third fastest population growth in the EU and a growing young population therefore demand for childcare is set to rise even further. There were 50,655 births in 1996 but this had risen to 64,237 in 2006 - 33,085 males and 31,152 females (CSO Statistics 2006b).

### **2.1.4 CHILDCARE**

In Ireland now, more commonly both parents work outside the home.

The total number of families availing of childcare in Ireland in 2002 was 398,300; in 2005 this increased to 413,100. (CSO 2005d QNHS: Quarter 1). Therefore with so many children availing of childcare it is imperative that family supports in Ireland are of the highest standards.

The government is making efforts to improve childcare conditions in Ireland, however the question remains, are costs considered? The recent 'Towards 2016' partnership agreement does not address the affordability of childcare (Government of Ireland 2006). Therefore, it can be argued that the high costs are here to stay and childcare costs can be expensive.

In the last 5 to 10 years it has become unusual that the woman stays at home looking after the children. Childcare facilities have sprung up everywhere in response to this situation. Childcare costs and services can vary between urban and rural areas with urban areas being more expensive. The CSO QNHS 2005a: Quarter 1) figures show the average cost of paid childcare in Ireland in 2005 was costing just over €120 per child per week. This represents an increase of over 23% in the 2-year period between the fourth quarter of 2002 and the first quarter of 2005. The average household cost varied by region with families in the Border-Midlands-West region paying just under €100 per week per week while at the other end of the scale families in the Dublin region were paying more than €145 per week. These high costs can result in some cases where one parent is working to pay for the childcare costs solely.

In 2006 a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – entitled '*Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*' – found that some Irish couples were spending up to 30% of their total income on childcare. Comparing Ireland to Sweden this OECD report states that parental fees cover about 9% of costs in pre-school amounting to about 2% of average income.

There is a difference in childcare preferences also. Crèche or Montessori was the most popular non-parental childcare type for families with pre-school children in the Dublin (15.5%) and Mid-East (11.7%) regions. In the Border, Midland and South-East regions, unpaid relatives were the main non-parental care type used. Paid carers proved to be the predominant non-parental childcare type for families of pre-school children in the West, Mid-West and South-West regions. For primary school-going children, the most favoured non-parental childcare type was an unpaid relative except in the West where paid carers (8.1%) were more popular. (CSO 2005b QNHS: Quarter 1).

### 2.1.5 WORK LIFE BALANCE

While the cost of childcare is a significant effect on the quality of life for working parents, work life balance also needs to be considered.

Blyston, Blunsden, and Dastmalchia (2006:1-2) discusses *Work Life and the Work-Life issue*. They assert that the issue of work-life balance and the difficulties of integrating multiple and sometimes conflicting roles, attracts considerable interest in the media, public policy discussions and academic research. The simultaneous presence of, and interrelationship between organisational, labour market and societal change has ensured that debates on questions of work-life integration or work-life balance show no signs of slackening. Much previous research has focused on the challenges faced by working mothers and dual-income parents, in achieving work-life balance. Before the 1970's the domains of 'work' and 'family' were treated as largely separate arenas. Since then, a growing recognition has been given to interdependence of work and family spheres and the difficulties of maintaining a balanced life when faced with competing demands from these two spheres. The consequences of the difficulty of balancing work and family are 'work-family conflict', defined as the inability to fulfil family responsibilities because of work pressure, and 'family-work conflict', which reflects the inability to fulfil work obligations due to family pressure. Fulfilling work obligations requires a Work life balance, which can be difficult to attain.

Because of traffic conditions, parents are often delayed on commuter routes on their way to work while having to leave their young child/children at a childcare facility in the morning as early as 7.00 a.m. and similar delays mean that they do not collect the child again until 6 p.m. or later. This makes it difficult to get a 'Work Life Balance' and it leaves parents very little 'quality time' with their child, owing to being exhausted from working and travelling. McGinnity and Russell (2007: 352) assert from their research, *Work Rich, Time Poor? Time-Use of Women and Men in Ireland*, that:

What emerges most clearly from the findings is that certain groups in the population are facing a particular time-squeeze – the employed and those caring for young children and adults. To the extent that more people,



particularly women, are now combining working and caring, this suggests that policies to facilitate work-life balance are needed to help ameliorate the effects of the high workload for these groups in contemporary Ireland.

Various media reports also tell of parents in the Dublin commuter belts, for example, Athy, County Kildare, having to leave their homes at 05.30am and not return home until 20.30pm, for example Crowe (2007) citing McWilliams: 'many younger people are struggling with large mortgages, long commutes and inadequate child care'.

In discussing the NESF report 31 (2005) on Early Childhood Care and Education, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) (2005) Briefing Paper, *Caring for the Future ... Who Cares?* is reported to be actively involved with the National Framework Committee on Work Life Balance since its establishment and has worked strenuously with member organisations to promote voluntary initiatives on Work Life Balance through running seminars, developing training modules and videos for managers and through the participation and support of many work life balance projects: 'Babies and Bosses' and 'Off The Treadmill' were two studies conducted (NESF report: 31, 2005:41). In looking at the 'Babies and Bosses' recommendations and conclusions from the fifth Periodic report: 37 from NESF they note that:

The one big area of disappointment for the NESF, is that one of its key recommendations, namely that the Government should provide free of charge a high quality pre-school ECCE session of 3.5 hours a day for five days a week for all children has not been accepted.

However, the NESF were pleased to record areas where its recommendations have already been implemented. Furthermore, a number of its key policy points have also been incorporated in the *Programme for Government 2007-2012* the Social Partnership Agreement *Towards 2016*, and the *National Development Plan 2007-2013*. The policy frameworks set out in these documents provide a valuable context for the further development and implementation of ECCE policies. As in the case of the NESF'S own report, these documents incorporate provisions for a review of progress in 2010. This should provide a valuable platform for planning and implementation up to 2015, which is the NESF target date for a comprehensive ECCE policy system to be in place, based on best practice principles (NESF report 37, 2008: 89-107).

Looking outside Ireland, Bungum, and (2006:163) explains that working life in Norway, as in other Western countries, is mainly an adult arena. Many of the different approaches to problems in working life are not especially important or relevant to children's everyday life and experience. It is not difficult at all to find explanations for the lack of 'children's voices' in work research; it is a field principally understood from an adult perspective. The question is: why should children's perspectives and perspectives on childhood be of any interest to researchers of working life? Although children in most Western societies do not, in the main, participate in paid working life, the adult working world has great implications for their everyday life.

### **2.1.6 GENDER AND WORK**

In the adult working world gender plays a big role.

In 2003 the European Foundation for the improvement of Living and Working Conditions published: *A new organisation of time over working life*. In it they noted that:

Employees are increasingly confronted with time stress both in the short term and over longer periods and in specific life phases. Many have difficulty marrying social and personal needs (care, lifelong learning, voluntary activities, un-paid work in the household) with demands from employers for more flexibility. At the same time, important groups of employees request greater flexibility in the workplace in order to improve their control over time use (time sovereignty) and their quality of life (European Foundation, 2003).

It is evident that five years have passed since this publication and it appears that time is now much more precious now especially for women who are trying to juggle childcare, work and housework and apart from much more women in the workforce since 2003 little has changed as regards implementing family friendly policies in most workplaces.

This is echoed by the following research by Nolan *et al* (2007:195).

In their study *The Meaning of Work in the New Economy* they did interviews with people working in the software companies in the USA. They found that while there was clear convergence between men and women in their work preferences and career



orientations, a combination of domestic circumstance, continuing patriarchal attitudes, and organisational context presents this as a constrained convergence. As in more traditional employment areas, these constrained choices lead to continuing disadvantage for women, with limits to progression in their careers and in the workplace.

However, the gender gap in educational attainment to the benefit of girls is a feature of many developed countries. This gap tends to increase at the higher levels of school education (Northern Ireland Assembly 2001). Attitudes to family are changing in Ireland too.

It is evident from the Irish Times *Men Today Poll* (September, 2008) that men's attitudes are changing as regards family by 48% of men agreeing that couples who are both working should equally share looking after the children and the home (McShane, 2008:10). Other changes happening in Ireland are changes in living standards as is explained as follows:

### **2.1.7 CHANGES IN LIVING STANDARDS**

Given that more people than ever are in the workforce; the Central Statistics Office (CSO 2007a) Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS): Quarter 4 figures show that there are 60.8% of women in the workforce, we wonder if quality of life has improved as we still hear about poverty in Ireland and especially child poverty.

Smeeding and Rainwater (2004:175-177) in his book *Comparing living standards across nations*, looked at thirteen countries and noted that children in the UK have the lowest real living standards of any children observed in the survey but the findings have political and policy implications also. The UK government has set a national goal of improving living standards and eradicating child poverty in Britain over the next decade. In the survey the United States showed a higher real level of overall income than all of the comparison countries; however, it was high and middle-income persons and particularly the well to do children who reap the benefits. As in America, low-income children in Ireland suffer in both absolute and relative terms; for example, in The Combat Poverty Advice to Government Budget 2009 issued in September 2008 they state that:

The latest poverty data (2006) show that 17 per cent of the population (equivalent to 721,000 persons) are 'at-risk-of-poverty' using a threshold of 60 per cent of median income (estimated to be €220 per week in 2008 values). A smaller figure of 6.9 percent of the population (293,000 persons) is in 'consistent poverty' (at risk of poverty and experiencing enforced deprivation of basic necessities<sup>2</sup>). The figures for children (0-18 years) in poverty are 22.4 per cent 'at risk of poverty' and 10.8 per cent in consistent poverty (282,000 and 69,000 children). Meanwhile, research by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice shows that only 15 out of a sample of 27 low-income household types are able to afford minimum essential budgets. The remaining 12 households experience significant budget shortfalls and are vulnerable to indebtedness in order to make ends meet (Combat Poverty Agency website).

Smeeding and Rainwater's (2004) showed in their survey that the average low-income child in the other 12 countries were at least 25 per cent better off than the average American child. When Mary Harney was Tanaiste, she remarked, 'Ireland was nearer to Boston than Berlin'. This could be taken to mean that life has moved into the fast lane in Ireland as in America and this was accelerated greatly in Ireland by the advent of the Celtic Tiger.

### **2.1.8 HOUSING FOR WORKING PARENTS**

Irish families have changed dramatically resulting from the boom of Celtic Tiger years. The expanding economy is making demands on everyone; there are exorbitantly high mortgage prices. The average price for new houses in 2006 was €305,637 for the State; in 1996 this was €87,202. In Dublin it was €97,758 for a new house in 1996 in comparison to €405,957 in 2006. (CSO Statistical Yearbook of Ireland 2007a).

The market is slowing down for the first time in a decade as demonstrated by the latest figures from the EBS/DKM Affordability Index which showed that by December 2007 the average first time buyer working couple in Ireland was spending 22.6% of their net income on mortgage repayments, compared with 26.4% a year ago (EBS/DKM 2008).

Because of the higher cost of living in Dublin and in larger cities, people are moving to the West of Ireland. While speaking at the *Look West* campaign in Dublin in September 2007, Lisa McAllister, Chief Executive of the Western Development Commission (WDC), commented on how figures from Census 2006 confirmed that

people wanted to move to the West and those that were already there have began regenerating the region. She noted that more than two thirds of the population increase in the seven western counties was due to inward migration because close to 40,000 people have come to live in the West since the last Census four years ago. Furthermore, the CSO 2007a Consumer Prices Bi-annual Average Price Analysis Dublin and Outside Dublin average price comparisons for November 2006, May 2007 and November 2007 show prices in Dublin ranging between 6.7%-7.6% higher than the rest of the country for most food/drink and services.

The ongoing high prices of mortgages against the modest increases in wages over the years together with the pressures from the booming economy has resulted in the need for dual parent incomes. So, whether parents live in Dublin or elsewhere, this is still a major issue, leading to the need for non-parental childcare.

### **2.1.9 WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE**

The QNHS on Childcare for the whole of Ireland: Quarter 1: 2005c shows that there were 96,200 couples (55.7%) at work who had pre-school children; there were 39,000 lone parents (32.9%) with pre-school children. In the same period there were 54.2% couples and 47.7% lone parents at work who had primary school children

In many cases lone parent families are headed by mothers. Finlay (2007b: 1) at the launch of the *'Da Project*, in Ballyfermot in Dublin in May, 2007 spoke of the changing face of Irish society and the shifting fabric of the traditional family unit which was highlighted in the 2006 census findings. He said, 'The number of divorced and separated people increased by 70% and 8.7% respectively between 2002 and 2006; these patterns contributed to the increase of 23% of lone parent families over the four-year period; in the majority of cases where there is a family break-down or a single parent, the family is headed up by the mother; the implication is that there are a vast number of children who are not in full-time contact with their fathers'.

Furthermore, there were 2,138,900 persons in employment in the fourth quarter of 2007, representing an increase of 66,800 or 3.2% in the year. This compares to an annual growth rate of 3.3% in the previous quarter and to a rate of 4.4% in the fourth

quarter of 2006. The increase of 45,800 (+5.2%) in female employment represented almost 69% of the total increase in employment, with male employment increasing by 21,000 (+1.8%) (CSO: QNHS, Quarter 4, 2007c: released 5/03/08).

In Sligo, the CSO Table (2006a) shows that there were 27,328 people in the labour force in Sligo in 2006. Of these 12,181 are female and 15,147 are males.

In addition, the CSO Equality in Ireland (2007a) report shows that in the 25-44 age group, 70.4% of women and 87% of men were in employment. While women accounted for 50% of the total population, they represented 90.9% of lone parents. The employment rate for women aged 20-44 with dependant children varied from 57.2% when the youngest child was under 4 years to 55.3% when the youngest child was aged 4-5 and then rose to 62.7% when the youngest child was aged 6-17.

The comparable rates for men were more even at around 91% irrespective of the age of the child.

The CSO (QNHS 2007d) figures show female participation in the labour force in Ireland at 54.5%, slightly below the EU average of 57.3% but low in comparison to Eurostat figures for female participation in the labour market, which in Denmark is at 73.4% and Sweden at 70.0%.

It is clear that Ireland is catching up on EU work participation for women.

It could be argued that in some cases here, as well as in other countries, mothers have changed the gender balance in breadwinning but changing the gender balance in caring for children remains a challenge for parents, work organisations and policy reform (Leira, 2002:146). Furthermore we have evidence that older women are staying on and partaking in employment for longer. It is evident that in Ireland, major changes have occurred in our society particularly for women and children.

#### **2.1.10 SOCIETAL CHANGES IN IRELAND.**

First, we can consider population changes. The CSO (statistics 2007a) show that there were 64,237 births registered in 2006.

We can look more closely at one quarter to illustrate the changes. In CSO (2007e QNHS: Quarter 2) there were 17,127 births registered, 8,667 males and 8,460 females, an increase of 1,148 on the quarter 2 figures of 2006. The quarter 2 2007 total is 24.8% higher than in 1998 when 13,729 babies were registered. Women aged 25-29 gave birth to 14,891 babies and women aged 30-34 gave birth to 22,002 babies in 2006. Ireland had the second highest fertility rate in the EU 27 in 2005 at 1.88 with France the only EU 27 country having a higher rate at 1.94. The EU average was 1.52.

The average age of mothers for births registered in CSO 2007f QNHS: Quarter 2 of 2007 was 31.2 years.

CSO (2007a) population and labour force projections 2006-2036 show that Irish fertility rates are still very high when compared with those of other European countries, and the trends in Europe continue to be largely downward. The high fertility assumption assumes the total fertility rate will increase very slightly from its 2003 level of 1.98 to 2 by 2011 and then stabilise at this level until the end of the projection period (2036).

There were approximately 189,200 lone parent families in 2006, an increase of 23 per cent on 2002. However, it must be borne in mind that the more precise family coding allowed by the revised relationship question used in the 2006 census has contributed to this increase. Lone mothers, where all of the children were under 15 years, showed the greatest increase (+57.6%). Nearly 86 per cent of lone parent families were headed by females (CSO 2006b Commentary). Furthermore, 53.1% of female lone parents were employed compared to 59.0% of other female parents (CSO 2007b Statistics).

Societal changes have altered people's lifestyles, even in infancy. Many infants start their out-of-home lives at an early age with non-familial caregivers in childcare settings (Lee, 2006:133). This is a fundamental change, potentially with major consequences for our society.

Social and economic conditions in Ireland are changing rapidly leading to a change in family life and the care of children. This may result in the growth of negative effects in the future. For instance, changed parenting patterns could lead to

delinquency/challenging anti-social behaviour, which could in turn, be attributed back to full day care in a non-parental environment (Hund, 1998). Prospective studies may show if this might be associated with increase in crime. 'Economic factors in general, and consumption growth in particular, appear to be among the most important determinants of fluctuations in the growth of property crime in industrialised countries' (Black and O'Connell, 1998:45). Most commentators on crime take it for granted that crime is linked to social and economic change (Brewer, Lockhart and Rodgers, 1997: 95).

This view has been supported by Casey (2007) speaking on television about assaults and attacks of vandalism by 'rich kids' being on the increase: 'Some sociologists have suggested that in some cases parents who are absent because of their jobs try and make amends by compensating their children with money; substituting time with money is not desirable and parents worried about their children must re-engage with them to somehow monitor their children's behaviour. They cannot expect their schools to raise their children in terms of sex, alcohol and drugs. The primary source of education on these issues is parents' (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE website).

In comparing statistics from the Children at risk in Ireland foundation (CARI) reports for 2004 and 2005 they show that intrafamilial sexual abuse calls to their offices were at 36% in 2004 while this figure had risen to 58% of their calls in 2005. Furthermore, calls relating to extrafamilial sexual abuse in children was at 28% in 2004 and had risen to 42% in 2005.

In addition, the results from the first ever Nationwide Study of Bullying in Irish first and second level schools conducted by O' Moore (2007) indicated that some 31% of Primary Students and 16% of Secondary Students have been bullied at some time. From circa 870,000 school going population, approximately 23% or 200,000 children are at risk of suffering the ill effects of bullying.

Furthermore, the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform introduced new laws and measures to tackle anti-social behaviour including behaviour orders (more commonly know as ASBO's) on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2007 for adults and on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2007 for children i.e. between the ages of 12 and 18.



It could be argued that authority of the family is diminishing from the evidence above, and even that the family itself in Ireland is changing form. The numbers seeking divorce in Ireland is increasing. The number of divorced persons increased from 35,100 to 59,500 between 2002 and 2006, an increase of 69.8 per cent, making it the fastest growing marital status category (CSO 2006a news and events).

The number of divorces granted by the Circuit Court and the High Court in 2006 was 3,466 (CSO 2006b Statistics). However, owing to the recent introduction of divorce in Ireland it is probable that these figures are accrued as a result of a backlog of people waiting for divorce proceedings to take place.

Marquardt (2005) comments on a US study, looking through the eyes of the child on divorce, and has uncovered new depths in the damage that separation of parents causes to children. In this first-ever national study, the grown children of divorce tell us *there's no such thing as a "good" divorce*. This nationally representative telephone survey of 1,500 young adults, half from divorced families and half from intact families - supplemented with more than 70 in-person interviews conducted around the country - reveals that any kind of divorce, whether amicable or not, shows lasting inner conflict in children's lives. Dr. Norval Glenn, co-author of the study found that even 'amicable' or 'good divorces' cause psychological injury that lasts for many years.

This research confirms that of Judith Wallerstein, one of the first experts to examine the more subtle psychological effects of divorce on children. Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee (2000) wrote a book titled, *'Unexpected Legacy of Divorce'*. In a chapter in the book (282-294), Wallerstein discusses the impact of divorce on children, summarised by saying: 'The legacy - and it's a very surprising legacy to me, but I think it's one that has really hit a chord throughout this country-- is that the major impact of divorce is not, as we thought, at the time of the break up, although that's very hard, but the major impact of divorce happens when they enter young adulthood and they... when the man/woman situation, man/woman relationship moves centre stage, and that's when the ghosts of the parent's divorce rise from the basement'.

Another notable societal factor is the number of homeless people. The Homeless Agency in Dublin conducts three yearly assessments and while there was a 19% decrease in the number of households homeless between the 2002 and 2005

assessments the 2005 figures still showed that there were 2015 people homeless in Ireland including 463 children under 18 (Homeless Agency website).

Moreover, the increased complexity of Irish society is evident at every level including increases in alcohol & drug consumption, and the problem of suicide (CSO 2006c Statistics). One person in 10 living in Ireland was not born in Ireland (CSO 2006), but this complexity is most noteworthy for parents in Ireland today because economics determine that they have to go to work and childcare is their number one priority. This has contributed to challenging changes for working parents. For example, changes have occurred in family life, even in patterns of household and family formation.

The traditional nuclear family has for many centuries and in most countries been the core unit of society. It has been the foundation and even the ultimate purpose in many people's lives. It has provided a stable framework to bring children into the world, to raise them, to teach them societal norms and how to become productive and happy human beings. It has been relied upon for emotional and financial support, and in many other regards (Kennedy, 2001). Latest CSO statistics: Yearbook 2007 shows an increase in marriages in Ireland, for example there were 21, 841 marriages in 2006, slightly up on 2005 figures which shows that there were 21,355 marriages.

A survey by Accord (2006) *'Married Life - The First seven Years'* conducted by Amárach: 2006 and based on interviews with 712 couples who are married for seven years or more, showed (77%) were 'very happy' with their marriages.

However, cohabiting couples are increasing; for example, the total number of cohabiting couples was 121,800 in 2006 up from 77,600 in 2002 - by far the fastest growing type of family unit. Cohabiting couples represented 11.6 per cent of all family units in 2006 compared with 8.4 per cent in 2002. Almost two thirds of them were couples without children (CSO 2006b news and events).

In 2006 there were 112,900 lone parents with a youngest child aged less than 18 (2.7% of the population). 90.9% of these lone parents were female. The percentage of lone parents employed was 54.8% in 2006 compared to 74.1% for other parents (CSO: Equality in Ireland Report 2007b). These societal changes are recounted by Kennedy.



Kennedy (2001) in her book *'From Cottage to Crèche'* recounts recent changes in family life in Ireland: 'We have experienced many changes in the family in Ireland in the past 10 years, changes in family patterns have been driven by economic factors which, when they gained sufficient strength, tended to outweigh those of tradition and religion. At the start of the twentieth century marriage between a man and a woman was 'till death us do part' and this was the cornerstone of the family and society' (Kennedy, 2001:240). Now there is more individuation and choice in Irish society with couples preferring to co-habit instead of getting married. Cohabiting couples represented 11.6 per cent of all family units in 2006 compared with 8.4 per cent in 2002 (CSO 2006c news and events).

Could all these changes in society be contributing to a decline in the family? This can be seen by comparing evidence from Denmark. The statistical facts about the Danish family could be mirrored in Ireland. Denmark is a country with an advanced welfare state as well as showing a decline in family life. Referring to Denmark Hansen (2004), notes that families with children where both parents have full time jobs have increased from 50% in 1980 to 83% in 1998. The share of children between 0–6 years of age, who were in day nursery, day care or kindergarten, was 7.3% in 1965. In 2000 the share had increased to 76.6%. These statistics are similar to what is happening in Ireland owing to the increase of women in the workplace and the need for paid childcare. Paid childcare includes out-of-school-hours care.

The OECD Policy Brief: (2006b) states: 'It is worth noting that out-of-school-hours care is almost non-existent in Ireland'. The 2006 Budget announced measures to create 5,000 places in after-school care by 2010.

A remarkable difference is seen now in family life in that parents spend very little time with their children who are in full time day care, for example, in many cases, from when the child is a baby they are in the crèche, then pre-school and on to primary school and then back to the childcare facility for after school care.

## Summary

In summary, this literature demonstrates that quality of life from a worldview is globally changing. This is most relevant in Ireland and can be attributed to the Celtic Tiger years. This era provided a booming economy in Ireland in which employment rose dramatically. Women were enticed back to work and women finishing college got jobs, stayed at work and enjoyed a career. The average age for women giving birth in 2007 was 31.2 years. There was a large increase in co-habiting as well as lone parents. The birth rate increased. Because of the increase of women at work there was a need for paid childcare. Childcare facilities have sprung up everywhere, but childcare proved expensive. In some cases where there were dual earner families it was evident that one person's wages went to pay for childcare. Another issue hindering working parents was the exorbitant prices for ordinary family houses. Both parents needed to work to pay for childcare and housing. Some people living in the city moved to towns outside Dublin which meant commuting to work and spending long hours in the car and away from home. Parents found it difficult to get a work life balance.

However, the boom years have brought changes to society in the name of bullying in schools and increased vandalism in the streets. Divorce, alcoholism, illegal drug use, homelessness and suicide are on the increase. Are these changes resulting from parents and children not spending enough time together? Could there be a connection between these social ills, stress suffered by working parents and children now spending long days in childcare facilities?

Research with a view to improving quality of life for parents and their children showed that quality of life in Ireland as elsewhere encompasses and should include men, women and children as well as listening to and valuing the voices of children.

A leading voice in the UK, David Cameron (2007) asserts that: 'the foundation of society is, or should be, the care of children by the man and the woman who brought them into the world. We want to make families stronger and society more responsible'. In comparison to past generations, now parents and families require

many supports in the care and education of their children. Section 2.2 deals with quality provision.

## **2.2: QUALITY PROVISION**

### **2.2.1 FAMILY SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN CONSIDERED TO BE AT RISK**

Quality family support works best when adults meet children with honesty and respect, to face fear and seek truth, to trust and be trust worthy, to risk and offer love. Focus must be on the whole person, not on a symptom or problem. Only really listening and waiting, in support and encouragement and in the development of self-confidence and esteem in both children and childcare workers, can achieve this. In order for this to work effectively and to pay the cost, workers need training and preparations and the same kind of listening and respect they offer to children (Crompton, 1990: 116-117). We must give our children a voice and listen to them.

### **2.2.2 LISTENING TO WHAT CHILDREN WANT/VALUING CHILDREN**

Listening to children is important; this could be done by the researcher observing children playing games with each other and by themselves, also by the researcher observing children in how they react to situations in the childcare facility. Of course direct dialogue with the children will yield excellent results also. In this way the children's own voices will be contributing to research and would enable changes to be made to existing or future policies to improve quality of life for them should this be necessary. In Ireland, studies are being conducted like this with children, for example a study by Hayes and Bradley (2008:54) *Accessing and hearing their voices: Contributing to the debate on participatory research with children and young people in Ireland –The experiences of the Ballymun needs analysis study*. This study focused directly on children and young people, with the purpose of making their lives better. It involved working with children and young people themselves, as well as with their parents, teachers, health professionals and others who play a part in their lives. Also at the Sociological Association of Ireland Conference (Galway, 2008) Fergus Hogan and

Maire O'Reilly from the Waterford Institute of Technology spoke about their study *Listening to Children: Children's Stories of Domestic Violence*. They interviewed 22 children aged between five and 21 who had been victims of domestic violence. Another study by McAuley from the Children's Rights Alliance with Bratman from the National Youth Council (2002) was titled *Hearing Young Voices: Consulting Children and Young People, including those experiencing poverty or other forms of Social Exclusion in relation to Public Policy Development in Ireland*. This study looked at children at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion.

Furthermore, in recent research in the UK, giving children a voice has shown that young children's understanding and experience of the services they receive could contribute to the development of new knowledge and to the development of more democratic communities in which they and their families are able to participate (Aubrey and Dahl, 2006:36).

In valuing our children, we have to challenge basic organisational cultures and norms by considering children's perspectives on family life as important inputs to their parents' employment conditions (Moore, Sixsmith, and Knowles, 1996:64). This comment has been echoed by Finlay (2005a) in his paper *The Rights of Children: Time for a New Crusade*. He says: 'Is it any wonder that children feature so little in our debates, and appear to matter so little at the heart of policy. There is a real danger that the political system will respond to the growing demand for better childcare by providing more childcare, without any real regard to whether it's better or not'.

Moreover, Finlay (2007c) who launched The Barnardo's Children's Declaration: *A Million Reasons to Get it Right*, has called for 26 weeks of paid parental leave to be added to the 26 weeks of maternity leave currently available.

Purcell (2001: 166) elaborates on this point by saying:

'For parents who attempt to include joint parenting and joint earning, whilst maintaining a successful relationship and parenting capably, the pressures are great, sometimes overwhelming. After achieving a certain level of financial ease, and comfort in living, accumulating more and more is not really going to make much of a

difference to your quality of life but the effort required may create a huge deficit in terms of time available for those you love.’

Moreover, in examining Irish childcare policy, *Childcare in Ireland: A Trade Union View* by SIPTU (2005) notes that Childcare has long been a concern of the Irish trade union movement. The first trade union submission to Government on this issue was made in the mid 1970s, and it has been raised in negotiations on every national agreement since 1987. Their main concerns have been with the quality of childcare available to working parents, the quantity and variety of options and their affordability; and the role of the State in developing an adequate infrastructure for a modern economy and society. Supply-side interventions – aimed at increasing the number of childcare places – are the responsibility of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and considerable progress has been achieved through the EOCP and other initiatives. However, the Department of Finance’s record has been less impressive in bringing forward supports to make childcare more affordable for parents. Overall, it has to be said that successive governments have failed to face up to the responsibility of developing an integrated, holistic approach to childcare: developing a high-quality, affordable system that gives all parents real choices about how best to combine their role as parents with their role as workers and how to ensure that all children get the best possible start in life. The Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare in its January 1999 Report set out eleven key recommendations – six on supply-side measures and five on demand-side measures – which they believed would improve the availability and affordability of childcare in Ireland (see page: 10).

However, although successive governments have worked on implementing many of the supply-side recommendations, they have managed to avoid the issue of certain demand side ones. In particular, they have avoided the issue of tax relief on childcare expenses – whether receipted or unreceipted – arguing instead that increases in Child Benefit would be sufficient to compensate parents for whatever form of childcare they might choose – paid or unpaid, receipted or unreceipted, parental or non-parental. SIPTU has never accepted either the rationale of this policy, or its practical effects; and has strongly criticised it every year since Budget 2000 (*Childcare in Ireland: A Trade Union View* by SIPTU (2005:1-25)).

### **2.2.3 FAMILY SUPPORTS IN IRELAND**

Section 3 of the Child Care Act 1991 states that the Health Service Executive (HSE) should provide family support services. The Government, while always providing universal access to education from the age of six years, has traditionally accepted children into formal school from the age of four years, but it has not had a universal system of childcare for children under 6. These facilities have grown up via the private sector as businesses; the remainder are led by communities and voluntary groups as non-profit making centres, which avail of various grant schemes in addition to some parental contributions.

Childcare is undergoing a time of great change and development in the community sector in Ireland. A new national programme and funding for childcare has been introduced. In Budget 2006, the Department of Health and Children (2006) announced the establishment of the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006 - 2010 (NCIP), under the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC), as a successor to the earlier Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme.

The new multi-annual Investment Programme is being introduced with the aim of funding 50,000 additional childcare places by 2010. This will be over and above the 41,000 places provided under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme or EOCP (26,000 places already created since the start of the EOCP plus some 15,000 places which are due to come on-stream before it ends in 2007). The new National Childcare Investment Programme will have:

- A capital funding stream with grant aid available to both private and community providers for the building or expansion of childcare facilities; and
- A current funding stream to assist with the staffing and other operating costs in those community facilities that cannot meet the costs from fee income alone and to underpin further development of the role of City and County Childcare Committees.

The new National Childcare Investment Programme will cost a cumulative €574 million in current and capital investment from 2006 to 2010. This is additional to the €215 million already allocated to 2006 and 2007 under the final two years of the existing Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (Department of Health and Children 2006b).



Previously, several government departments had a say in the delivery of childcare services, but now a new institutional approach has been adopted with linkages between the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, other government departments, and dedicated statutory bodies (such as the National Children's Office and the Ombudsman for Children), and a new local infrastructure in the form of City and County Childcare Committees (NESF report: 31, 2005:47).

In the past many government departments had responsibility for the implementation of childcare services and funding. The spread of responsibility may have inhibited the delivery of good quality childcare services. It could be argued that the childcare profession appeared to be undervalued in Irish society, for example, up until recently people did not need any qualification to work with children in childcare facilities. It was seen as a babysitting job that anybody could do and the wages paid to workers was very low, for example (CSO 2006: Occupations) shows annual pay for childcare workers was €15,767 in 2002 and rose to €21,778 in 2006.

However, the future is looking good, among other things, now there is a Minister of State for children (currently it is Mr Barry Andrews T.D). Furthermore, in July 2007 Mr Brendan Smith (previous Minister for Children) introduced a new subvention scheme worth €153 million under the current EU co-funded EOCP support scheme. It is allocated to community not-for-profit childcare facilities to provide quality childcare at reduced rates for disadvantaged parents. The introduction of the scheme honours the Government's commitment to bring a new grant scheme into effect in 2008 when the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme Support Scheme comes to an end in December 2007, later altered to June 2008. Subventions for full day care places will range from €80 to €30 (€110 to €60 for a child under 1 year) per week with pro rata subventions for shorter day care services (Department of Health and Children (2007a).

There have been notable improvements in the provision of child centred services over recent years. We now have an Ombudsman for Children, Emily Logan; efforts have been made to co-ordinate the various services provided by different departments by the appointment of Ms Sylva Langford as the Director General at the office for the Minister for Children. Recently spending has increased significantly, with the government investing in the improvement of childcare facilities, however historically Ireland's contribution to childcare was small when compared to other EU countries.

In 2005 Ireland invested only 0.04% of GDP in comparison to Sweden at 2.0% and Denmark, which invested 2.4% (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions website). Furthermore, as stated on page 59, public spending for Early Learning and Childcare ranges between 0.2% to 2% of GDP for 0-6 year olds in Canada.

In Budget 2008 Brian Cowan (then Minister for Finance) increased the Early Childcare Supplement from €1,000 to €1100. This is payable annually to all parents with respect to children under 6 years of age (Department of Finance, 2007).

However, it can be argued that together with spending on childcare provision, the broader issue of child poverty needs to be taken into account. The CSO: 2006 statistics show that 60% of households headed by an unemployed person are at risk of poverty but there is a higher risk of poverty among female-headed households, for example, almost 22% of persons living in households headed by a female were at risk of poverty in 2006, compared to 14.2% of male-headed households. In addition, they were more than twice as likely to be in consistent poverty (11.1% compared to 4.4%) (CSO 2006 EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)).

In addressing the need for childcare and family support by commenting on the budget; the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) was clearly unhappy with budget 2008. In a news release Congress General Secretary, David Begg (2007) said: 'Budget 2008 had failed to deliver for working families and prioritised economic needs over social necessities, equally there was nothing substantial on childcare, a cost which is crippling working families with some couples paying up to €28,000 per year'. These crippling costs could lead to child poverty.

Callan (2006) demonstrates how Ireland still has one of the highest child poverty rates in Europe, despite administrative improvement and economic success. In child poverty ranking among 26 English speaking countries, Ireland ranks at 22, 3 below USA which ranks at 25 and has the highest child poverty rate; Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden rank 1-4 and have the best ratings with little child poverty.



In Northern Ireland, the Interim Report on the Committee's Inquiry into Child poverty, published 9<sup>th</sup> January 2008 found that extra 30,000 childcare places are needed and 10,000 extra jobs for those willing to work for the 92,000 lone-parents households with 150,000 children, 70% of who are living in poverty (Northern Ireland Assembly website). The following documents the poverty perspective in the EU:

The UNICEF report (2007): 'An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries: Report Card 7: Child Poverty in Perspective' showed that among all of the 21 OECD countries there are improvements to be made and that no single OECD country leads in all six of the areas studied. 'All countries have weaknesses to be addressed; small North-European countries dominate the top half of the table, with child well-being at its highest in the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Finland (Innocenti Director Marta Santos Pais).

Education is the key to easing and freeing children from poverty in Ireland as elsewhere. Pre-school facilities, where they exist, are hugely expensive and often inadequate; facilities need to be of the highest quality. High-quality family support services are vital in any civilised and progressive society. They cost a considerable amount of money. But that investment in the future can be repaid many times over in terms of better-adjusted and creative citizens. Economists tell us that growth rates are likely to slow after 2007. That is all the more reason to invest now in those services, which will have a long-term and positive influence on our society (NESF report 31: 2005:7).

The agreement of the Irish Government to the (EU) Barcelona target to achieve childcare provision for 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school going age (6 years of age in Ireland) and, for at least 33% of children under 3 years of age by the year 2012, is significant in determining the future for our children (NESF report 31: 2005:8). Progress towards the Barcelona Council targets is not measurable at present due to a lack of data in Ireland. However, this agreement by the Government is significant in moving towards universal provision of childcare, despite the still contentious issue of who will pay for this childcare. The Labour Party wants among other things to give all children a year of free pre-school education (Childcare and pre-school education, 2005: 14).

The best way to invest in the future is to show regard for all children. Children are the future and the future depends on the quality of their lives. Coordinated delivery and support of services must be led by a clear and coherent national policy (Hayes, 1995: 33).

#### **2.2.4 FAMILY SUPPORTS IN UK**

The UK government has worked to co-ordinate supports for children and their parents:

In the UK family support is looked at by New Labour's policies in relation to welfare reform and could be examined from the concept of 'the social investment state'. It argues that 'investing in children' and creating 'responsible parents' are vital features of many policies and services initiatives (Featherstone, 2006:12). The importance of locating family support activities within an understanding of the role of the state and in the context of family change today is vital (Katz and Pinkerton, 2003 cited in Featherstone, 2006:12). To improve and promote the quality of life for children and their parents in the UK, the government set up Sure Start.

Sure Start was set up in 1999 as the result of the Government in the UK responding to the childcare crisis. Sure Start Programmes worked by bringing together early education, childcare, health and family support for the benefit of young children living in disadvantaged areas and their parents. Programmes are an area-based initiative with the aim of improving the health and well-being of families and children from before birth to four, so children are ready to flourish when they go to school. Local programmes are concentrated in neighborhoods where a high proportion of children are living in poverty.

Weinberger *et al*, (2005: 256) note that one of the most striking features of Sure Start is the way that workers from different agencies and professional backgrounds have been brought together to work towards a common aim. Of particular relevance to early childhood communities was the programme to develop children's centres offering integrated services for under-5's and their families at the hub of every community including children with special needs. The extended school agenda networks meant schools were to play a central role in coordinating services for all children. Extended Schools, both mainstream and special schools, operate as hubs for

services for school-aged pupils and their parents. The first challenge for the professionals who are implementing this radical policy agenda is to sustain the quality of services whilst reshaping them. Also there was an increased interest in listening to the voices of young children in defining and monitoring the quality of children's services.

A further challenge was to improve the golden triangle of curriculum/pedagogy/assessment in promoting young children's learning. Also, a new concept of the early years professional is to be developed in the UK. S/he may be a 'new' teacher trained to work across care and education setting from birth to 16, or a pedagogue of graduate status trained to work across the sectors of care, learning and health. To coincide with this the UK government has commenced the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership and all managers of children's centres will be required to gain this qualification (Anning and Edwards, 2006: 167).

Further to Sure Start in the UK were the Policy changes as follows:

Anning and Edwards (2006:159-167) cite Moss and Penn (1996) who promoted a forward-looking vision of integrated services for young children and their families. Moss and Penn's vision was: 'a comprehensive, integrated and coherent early childhood service, flexible and multi-functional.... A rich and enhancing experience for everyone involved in it – children first and foremost, but also parents, staff and members of the local community' (Anning and Edwards, 2006: 165).

Another policy was the implementation of *Early Years Vouchers*.

These childcare Tax Credit are available to alleviate childcare costs. They are available to all parents with children, whether working or not, although employment status will have a bearing on the level of credit (Skinner, 2003 cited in Fawcett, Featherstone and Goddard, 2004:39). Early Years Vouchers can make significant savings; for example, a parent in the 2006-7-tax year could save up to £962.28 per year if they were a 22% taxpayer and £1195.56 per year for a 40% taxpayer. The vouchers can be used for any form of childcare, from the ages of 0-15 (16 if disabled) years old, and can include but is not limited to nurseries, childminders, nannies,

breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday clubs, providing the childcare is approved or registered (Childcare vouchers website).

### **2.2.5. FAMILY SUPPORTS IN EUROPE**

In Europe, in May 2006, data showed that the allocation of support in the provision of childcare places, in line with reaching the Barcelona target of 33%, is still too low as is depicted by the following excerpt from the report:

It appears that five Member States have reached the Barcelona target of 33% childcare for children under three: Denmark, Belgium, France, Sweden and the Netherlands. Thus, twenty Member States have progress to make in the next three and a half years, including several countries in which the availability of childcare is below 10% for children under three: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Poland. (PES Discussion Paper, 2006).

Evidently, there is still room for improvements in many European countries.

Furthermore, within Europe there is a variety of work family policies and the *'Population and Development Review'* Volume 32 Issue 2, published June 2006 gives an account of Policies to Reconcile Labour Force Participation and Childbearing in the European Union. The level and nature of European work family policies differs considerably with every country having its own unique constellation of childcare services, leave facilities, flexible working time arrangements and financial allowances. The extent of the differences make an overall assessment difficult, yet it is clear that some countries (like Belgium, Denmark, Iceland) rely rather heavily on childcare services, while other (Lithuania, Hungary, Finland, Bulgaria, Romania, Austria, the Czech Republic) rely more heavily on leave facilities (E.U., *Population and Development Review* 2006). Also in the UK, Joshi (2002: 445-474) reports on *Production, Reproduction, and Education: Women, Children, and Work in a British Perspective* in the *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Sep., 2002). Joshi discusses how the increase in economic opportunity for women has been offered as an explanation of low fertility, and maternal responsibility as an explanation of women's underachievement compared to men's in the sphere of work. The research concludes that the evidence on gender equity suggests that increases in education reduce the difference in earning power between men and women and the difference of paid and domestic work for couples. She concludes by noting that: 'reproduction is

worthy of public appreciation and support and as a venture in which government, employers, schools, fathers and mothers need to work together', (Joshi, in Population and Development Review, 2002, 468).

### **2.2.6 FAMILY SUPPORTS IN US**

There is an absence of supportive programmes in America and research shows that America is lagging behind in its policies for supporting families.

This is confirmed by Gornick and Meyers (2004) showing America lagging behind other industrialised countries in supporting working families. In the absence of supportive public programs and regulations, American parents are struggling to craft private solutions that reconcile work and family responsibilities. Addressing these issues will require significant new investments.

### **2.2.7 FAMILY SUPPORTS IN NEW ZEALAND**

In New Zealand programmes are good. Goelman (2004a) asserts that Early Childcare Education (ECE) in New Zealand includes early child development centres for the 0 to 5 age group, kindergartens for the 3 to 4 age groups as well as home-based care and play centres. The most recent statistics from New Zealand indicate that nearly 64% of all children in that target-age range can be accommodated in licensed spaces. Close to 100% of all children in New Zealand had participated in at least one kind of licensed early childhood group programmes at some point in their first five years of life. New Zealand invests heavily in comparison to Canada as depicted by the following: In the budget year (2004-5) the New Zealand government has allocated \$451 million (NZ dollars) in direct operating subsidies to childcare programmes to service a population of 3.9 million individuals. Canada has allocated a similar sum - \$500 (Canadian) - to all early child development programmes in a country of 31 million individuals.

It is self-evident that good quality childcare benefits children, parents and the economy of any country.

## Summary

In summary, quality provision in childcare in the form of support to children at risk in Ireland in Ireland has been undergoing a great time of change and development over the past five years. A new national programme and funding for childcare has been introduced. There will be 50,000 extra childcare places by 2010. Now there is a Minister for Children as well as an Ombudsman for Children. Financial supports towards childcare and costs of young families have improved in Ireland over the past five to ten years. However a UNICEF report (2007) noted that among the 21 richest OECD countries there are improvements to be made and no single country leads in all six of the areas studied. Outside Ireland, for example in the UK they have introduced the Sure Start programme giving support to children and their parents. In Europe only five Member States have reached the Barcelona target of 33% childcare for children under three. Supports for children and parents are good in New Zealand but poor in the US.

### 2.2.8 QUALITY IN CHILDCARE.

Abbott and Langton (2006: 69-78) argue that quality is neither some unattainable holy grail, nor something that once captured can be preserved. Quality is dynamic and will change as new information emerges alongside new technologies, new policies and new kinds of childcare and childcare professionals. Also innovative approaches to work with young children will always push the boundaries of what we perceive to be 'quality'. The challenge for all those involved in extending these boundaries is how we can truly reflect the views of all those whose 'voices' are not usually heard in examining, describing, evaluating and judging what is of 'quality' in early years contexts.

Moreover, in Ireland quality is going to be measured on an ongoing basis with the 'Growing up in Ireland', (ESRI/TCD) study that commenced in April 2006, and it will be completed by April 2013. It will cost €24m and it will follow the progress of 8,000 nine-year-olds and 10,000 nine-month-olds over a seven-year period. This should enable them to provide assistance and support to parents in the future, in order



to improve the quality of life for them and their children because childrearing can be difficult and overwhelming for families, especially those in which both parents work outside the home, as has been already shown (2.1.3 above) (Children's Research Centre website).

Donohoe and Gaynor (2007:46) while speaking about quality indicators note that it is neither possible nor appropriate to set down exact and unchanging quality standards which can be applied across the board in early year's services and that each centre must formulate its own definition of quality, one which meets all the needs of the children and adults involved.

Quality provision in early childhood education and care in Ireland has improved greatly over the last decade and it is going from strength. Thinking is informed by theory and best practice. In *Engaging Young Children*, Hayes and Kernan (2008: 3-4) discuss seven linked themes or key messages that are derived from research and theorising, which are:

1. The view of young children as active agents in their own learning
2. The dynamic, social and interactive nature of early learning
3. The critical role of the adult
4. Early childhood education and care as nurture
5. The notion of content-, language- and risk- rich environment
6. The importance of play and playfulness as a pathway to learning
7. The effective dimension of learning in which they prioritise a sense of security and belonging in early childhood education and care settings.

All seven points are of immense importance for non-parental childcare settings.

Where non-parental childcare is the option for families in Ireland, it should be of the highest quality. Childcare and early education should aim to ensure that children experience a healthy and safe environment that respects the child and encourages self-confidence and an interest in learning (Hayes, 2005:22).

The National Children's Strategy sees quality childcare service as: 'One which provides enhancing experiences for children and positive interactions between adults and children' (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1999: 49). Parents need to be supported in the community and in the provision of good quality childcare and support services. There are many organisations throughout Ireland providing support to childcare facilities to enable them in their delivery of a quality service to children and their families for example, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

High quality standards need to be achieved and maintained in all aspects of childcare. The National Framework for Quality (NFQ [CECDE], 2006) is involved in the coordination of existing national policy, practice and research. In the report's final recommendations it recommended that the implementation of the NFQ should be the responsibility of a centralised agency, which is in turn supported by a coordinated infrastructure at national, regional and local level (Duignan and Walsh, 2004). At the moment childcare is not mainstreamed in Irish Government policy, as the government mainly funds childcare in cases where children are deemed to be at risk.

In Ireland, to ensure that standards are maintained all childcare facility proprietors must register with the Health Service Executive (HSE). Standards in childcare are of the utmost importance. New standards came into effect from 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2007. These Regulations set down the high standards of health, safety and welfare that must be in place before care services can be provided. The Department of Health and Children (2007) launched the new Preschool's inspection Report. In it they detail how inspectors from the HSE carry out investigation in pre-schools and anywhere that children are being cared for. Inspections are unannounced and they occur on a regular basis. On completion of the inspections the inspector writes a report and if needs be gives recommendations for change/alterations where necessary to proprietors of childcare facilities (Dept. of Health and Children, 2007b).

Furthermore, while discussing *Quality Matters* in their book *Birth to Three Matters: Supporting The Framework of Effective Practice*, Abbott and Langton (2006: 69-78) under the headings: Children and parents matter; Relationships matter; Environment matters; Quality matters out of doors; Planning matters and Inspection matters,



conclude that quality is an elusive construct, which is transformed and re-shaped by the perceiver and, whilst measures of its visible aspects are possible, other features are both difficult to identify and, in some cases, im-measurable. Effective practice involves fully qualified and trained staff.

### **2.2.9 THE IMPORTANCE OF FULLY TRAINED AND QUALIFIED STAFF AND THE LASTING EFFECTS OF GOOD QUALITY CHILDCARE ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

Evidence shows that fully trained and qualified childcare staff are aware and appreciate that each child is a unique being and will reach their developmental milestones at different paces.

Gilligan cited in Murray and O'Doherty, (2004:29) in 'EIST', writes: 'Children in their first four years, develop at a pace unparalleled at any other stage in life....

Children's development is heavily dependent on the availability, resources and capacity of their caretakers'.

It is the mission and should be the vision of the childcare facility/childminder to encourage, enable and enhance the child, thus allowing the child's potential to develop to the full. In order for this to happen, the child has to be in an environment where good quality childcare is the norm. Peisner-Feinberg (2004) has found that quality childcare has a good lasting effect on pre-school children.

Peisner-Feinberg (2004:4) asserts that:

'Research evidence supports the contention that better quality child care [for children of preschool age] is related to better cognitive and social development for children. While these effects of childcare quality are in the modest to moderate range, they are found even after adjusting for family selection factors related to both the quality of care and to children's outcomes. Numerous studies have found short-term effects of child care quality on children's cognitive, social and emotional development during the preschool years. Longer term effects lasting into the elementary school years have also been found, although fewer longitudinal studies have been conducted to examine this issue. Moreover, these results indicate that the influences of childcare quality are important for children from all backgrounds. While some studies have found even stronger effects for children from less advantaged backgrounds

(suggesting that this issue may be even more critical for children already at risk for school failure) the findings indicate that children from more advantaged backgrounds are also influenced by the quality of care' (Peisner-Feinberg 2004:4).

Evidence indicates that parents have to avail of non-parental childcare and we need to examine this care in its totality, and study the impact that long absences from home and parental care will have on our children in the future. Quality childcare is essential.

Friendly (2004) in Canada asserts that good quality childcare provides a dual purpose 1) enabling parents to work and 2) providing educational/social activities for children. Friendly summarises research carried out and documented by nine prominent researchers documenting child-care research from the perspective of childcare's impact on child development. The research shows that much is known about the effects of childcare and the factors associated with its effects. High quality childcare, provided by well-educated, sensitive early childhood educators, well supported and accompanied by a good mix of other family policies, is a benefit, not a danger, to the social and cognitive development of children across the economic spectrum. This is echoed in the following study by Timmins (2008) who asserts that 'children in centre-based childcare have higher cognitive scores and exhibit less conduct/peer problems and more prosocial behaviour than those in maternal care'.

In addition, as McCartney (2004) points out: 'childcare is now an ordinary part of life for children in most western countries'. The key policy challenge is to take the knowledge from the research presented in these papers and put it into practices and public policies that ensure that the effects of childcare of children and families are the best they can be.

These thoughts have been corroborated and documented by research conducted by Ahnert and Lamb (2004). They assert that it is only recently that researchers have begun to explore the advantages of good-quality care and its potential benefits for children. In particular, childcare offers opportunities for more extensive social contacts with peers and adults, and thus may open an extended social world for children. Positive childcare experiences may also enhance later educational opportunities, such that those experiencing early non-parental care are better able to benefit from education, adjust to routines, and resist conflicts. According to Ahnert

and Lamb (2003:74) when discussing *Shared care: Establishing a balance between home and child care settings*, home remains the emotional center of children's lives and it is important that supportive parent-child relationships not be harmed by childcare experiences even when children spend considerable amounts of time in care.

As explained good quality childcare has beneficial effects for young children. Andersson (2003:1) explains that if the quality is not good the interaction with the mothers may be jeopardised. 'The quality of interaction with their mothers may be jeopardised by low-quality care and extended periods of time spent in care. In some cases if adequate funding is not available at the start it could prove to be the cause of problems later on'.

Andersson (2003:3) asks the pertinent question, 'Can we really afford to spend so much money on our children?' Then he answers by saying: 'Either we spend this money now or we will have to spend ten times as much to take care of all the problems a bad family support system will create later on'.

Evidence has shown that it is best to invest heavily in the early years rather than trying to correct it later on, for example the following longitudinal studies documented at the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC) have shown excellent results: Early Head Start and Head Start; The Abecedarian Study; Chicago Child-Parent Center Program and in the US the State-Specific Longitudinal Studies. Also the following (Heckman 2004; Vandell, Henderson, and Wilson 1988; Lawrence, Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart 1993; The Educational Research Foundation 2008; Heckman and Masterov 2004; Cleveland and Krashinsky 1998; Smith 2006; Hanson, Morrow and Bandstra, 2006).

In Ireland in 1994 the Department of Education initiated a pilot pre-school intervention project, the *Early Start*, in forty disadvantaged areas nationwide (Hayes, 2002:68). Other projects include '*Breaking the Cycle*' and '*The Rutland Project*' (O'Toole, 2000:126). Evidence from the evaluations of these projects is as follows:

### *Rutland Street project*

Smyth and McCabe (1999) emphasise that the best known example of an early intervention programme in the Irish context is the *Rutland Street project*. This project began in 1969 and ran as a research project until 1974 (David, 1999:81). The basic purpose of the project was to develop strategies to prevent school failure in disadvantaged areas. The project came about as a result of co-operation between the Bernard van Leer Foundation, an organisation concerned with the promotion of innovation in education to meet the needs of the disadvantaged child, and the Department of Education in Ireland. The Department contributed the normal financial provision available to schools, while the special features of the project were funded by the Foundation. The Rutland Street area was one of high unemployment and poverty with low levels of educational attainment, located in Dublin's inner city. The area was selected in response to demands by teachers and voluntary groups concerning the problem of educational failure in the area.

The development of the project was influenced firstly by a number of the early intervention projects (such as Head Start) in the North American context, and secondly, by Piaget's work on child development. The objective of the curriculum was to develop skills that would facilitate adaptation by the children to the work of the primary school. This involved the development of skills of perceptual discrimination, the extension of the child's knowledge of the world, the development of skills in the organisation of knowledge and the development of language skills. Children were to follow this cognitively oriented, structured programme for two pre-school years. The Pre-School Centre was targeted at three and four year old children, catering for 180 children in all. Children attended morning or afternoon sessions of two and a half hours, and were taught in groups of 15 by a teacher and a classroom assistant. A cooked meal was provided to children in the middle of the school day.

In addition to the emphasis on child development, the Centre aimed to increase the amount of contact between parents and the school through the establishment of a Mothers' Club, an Advice Centre, and regular parent-teacher meetings. This work with parents was also supported by three social workers who conducted intensive casework with some of the most severely disadvantaged families. In 1971 it was decided to develop home-school contacts through a home-based intervention

programme. The aim of this programme was to change the teaching style of the mother and to increase her confidence in her ability as an educator. It involved twenty-six mothers being visited at home for one hour per week by one of the home teachers. The focus of each session was on the development of the child's language and communication skills. (Holland, 1979; Kellaghan, 1977).

The Rutland Street project was intended as an experimental programme with on-going evaluation built into the work of the programme. Evaluations show results of comparisons when children participating in the programme were compared to a control group of children living in the same catchment area. By the end of the two year programme, participants showed an increase in their intelligence scores and an improvement in measures of pre-school readiness. In addition, a survey of mothers indicated more positive attitudes towards, and satisfaction with, the pre-school, along with greater involvement in the education of their children. However, on transfer to primary school, children showed a falling-off in their intelligence scores over the first three years; this pattern was particularly marked among the children with initially higher test scores.

The pattern of initial improvement followed by gradual falling-off was similar to that found in many American evaluations of early intervention programmes. An interesting feature of the Rutland Street project was a follow-up of participants at age 16 in order to assess the longer term benefits of programme participation. This evaluation indicated no differences between the control and experimental groups in subsequent absenteeism from school or in social deviance. However, a number of positive benefits were evident. Firstly, participants reported greater encouragement from home to attend second-level school. Secondly, participants were more likely to stay on until second-level schooling and to take State examinations (Smyth and McCabe 1999).

### *Early Start Pre-school Project*

Lewis and Archer (2003) in the *Early Start Pre-school Evaluation: Report on Observation visits to Schools*, explains that as part of an integrated approach to problems of disadvantage in designated schools, Early Start was established in eight

locations in the 1994/95 school year and in a further 32 locations in the following year to provide for three year old pre-school children. While the programme was broadly concerned with the development of the whole child, it was primarily an intervention that was designed to promote language and cognitive development and to prevent school failure. Several features, including a number relating to personnel support, that differentiate the programme from provision for the infant classes of primary schools can be identified. First, the school day which consists of a morning or afternoon session is much shorter for Early Start pupils than for infant pupils. Secondly, class size is limited to 15 pupils. A third innovation feature is that each teacher is assisted by a full-time childcare worker. Fourthly, all schools involved in Early Start have the support of a Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator (though this provision has recently been extended to all primary schools that are designated as disadvantaged) and are in a position to divert the services of the co-ordinator towards the promotion and development of Early Start. Outside of school, a strong emphasis in parent involvement was envisaged from the outset. It was also intended that Early Start would evolve in association with other community based agencies and individuals involved in dealing with disadvantage at local level. Evaluations concluded that there were improvements in the implementation of Early Start following the introduction of a new regime of in-service (Lewis and Archer, 2002:44). These included greater parental involvement; better working relationships between teachers and child care workers, and a shift from whole group to small-group learning contexts. However, no centre did extremely well and no centre did extremely poorly. Some further investigations of learning outcomes, beginning with a review of the Early Start profiles to determine the most appropriate method of assessing pupils' achievements, would be necessary to reach a definitive judgement on these issues (Lewis and Archer, 2003: 1-19).

Further studies have been done for example the following study by Trei (2004):

This study documented the children of single mothers who entered the workforce after the welfare reforms of 1996 in the United States. The results, collected from interviews with four hundred and fifty one families in California and Florida, showed that the cognitive growth and school-readiness skills of preschoolers who attended childcare centres accelerated up to six months ahead of children who remained in



home-based care. This positive trend increased an additional two months among children sent to high-quality centres with a stable, college-educated staff.

Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller and Rumberger (2005a) writes about another study conducted by Stanford University and the University of California (4<sup>th</sup> November, 2005) – ‘*How much is too much?*’ Involving Loeb *et al.* the study examined the influence of preschool centres on children’s development nationwide. The findings suggest that as policy makers move to offer all families’ access to free preschool, children from middle-class families will be likely to experience modest benefits in terms of cognitive growth, even at current levels of uneven program quality. Yet this also means that *disparities* in early learning and social development among social-class or ethnic groups will not necessarily narrow as a result of universal preschool, since benefits accrue to children across the range of family income. Children from the very poorest families may benefit the most if resources are focused on their communities.

In addition, Timmins (2008) found that ‘modelling socioeconomic groups (SES) differences reveals that children from low-income families benefit more from childcare early in life than high-income families in terms of cognitive development and emotional, conduct and peer outcomes.

Another, study by Loeb *et al* in (2005b) examined the influence of preschools on children’s social and cognitive development. Previous research has demonstrated that attending centre care is associated with cognitive benefits for young children. However, little is known about the ideal age for children to enter such care or the "right" amount of time, both weekly and yearly, for children to attend centre programs. Using national data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K), this paper asks whether there are optimal levels of centre care. It looks at the duration and the intensity and whether these levels vary by race or income.

Their findings show that: on average attending centre care is associated with positive gains in pre-reading and math skills, but negative social behaviour. Across economic levels, children who start centre care between ages two and three see greater gains than those who start centres earlier or later. Further, starting earlier than age 2 is related to more pronounced negative social effects. Results for centre intensity vary by income levels and race. For instance, poor and middle-income children see

academic gains from attending centre intensively (more than 30 hours a week), but wealthier children do not; and while intense centre attendance negatively impacts on social development for both black and white children, it does not have any negative impact for Hispanic children.

Similarly, Belsky (2005) asserts that placing children in an average non-maternal facility for long hours does seem to be associated with some (modest) developmental risk, especially with respect to mother-child relationships, problem behaviour, and social competence and academic work habits. Such outcomes are not merely by-products of low quality childcare. Concurring with this evidence was the following study in the US (2002) by Brooks-Gunn, Hann and Waldfogel:

Although quality of child care, home environment, and maternal sensitivity also mattered, the negative effects of working 30 hours or more per week in the first 9 months were still found, even when controlling for child-care quality, the quality of the home environment, and maternal sensitivity. Implications for policy are also discussed. It is evident that when parents work long hours and leave their child in a childcare facility, it can be damaging to the child. The study highlights the pressures and stresses working parents endure to have some quality in their own life and for their children.

Parents have to rely evermore on early years interventions to help to fulfil their children's dreams and according to Horgan and Douglas (2001:23): 'All early years educators are missionaries – all children have dreams'.

In the important work of caring for and educating young children we must strive to provide the very best we can for them in an atmosphere of equality and tolerance. We must respect children for what they are and not what they will become. While acknowledging what we can do for the child in terms of encouraging and challenging her development and fostering her prosocial skills, we must never lose sight of the whole child, all her aspects and the other people in her life (Hayes, 1999:206).



In addition, while commenting on the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) study as discussed on page 94 of this paper Gaffney (2005:17) commenting on results produced then by the NICHD notes that while children's problem behaviours wax and wane, one thing remains constant in wave after wave of the study. As with emotional security and cognitive capacities, children's behaviour is much more strongly influenced by the quality of mothering and the home environment than by the quantity and quality of childcare. That is not to say that quality of childcare does not count - it does, very much. High quality is consistently related to better emotional, cognitive and educational outcomes for children. Neither is it to say that quantity does not count. Gaffney (2005) says: 'this leads me to the last question: How much childcare is too much childcare'?

Gaffney (2005:17) answers this question by noting that 'the answer is that there is no scientifically established threshold'. However, she does advocate the value of longitudinal research which can monitor the effects of children from infancy right through their childhood where they have clocked up extensive hours in care and away from parents. Researchers have to remain vigilant about so-called sleeper effects, that is, latent vulnerabilities which may take time to manifest themselves.

Gaffney (2005:17) concludes by discussing that parents constantly struggle to balance the many needs and desires of families: their child's welfare, their economic situation, their interest in their careers, their leisure. If possible, one parent should try to work outside the home not more than 20 hours a week in the first and second years, and not more than 30 hours a week years in the third year. The NESF has recommended that, by 2009, maternity and parental leave be extended so that mothers can choose to stay at home full-time in the first year (Gaffney, 2005:17).

## Summary

In summary, it is evident that good quality childcare involves qualified trained staff who work in conjunction with the parents and the child. Numerous studies here have shown the results of good quality childcare; national and international studies have testified that early intervention with child prove to show great results later on in life. Good quality childcare advances quality of life for children and their parents. This is especially true where children are disadvantaged or poor. These interventions at an early stage, for example, in pre-schools will stand to children throughout their lives as is shown here by *The Rutland Street Project* and *Early Start Pre-school Project* that it is well worth investing early in children in pre-schools. Quality provision has improved over the years and this is due to research and thinking in terms of theory (Hayes and Kernan 2008: 3-4).

In Ireland to ensure that standards are maintained all childcare proprietors must register with the HSE and be subject to random inspections.

Quality in Ireland is now being measured on an ongoing basis with the longitudinal study '*Growing up Ireland*'; this study is being conducted jointly by the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin.

### **2.2.10 CENTRE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION (CECDE).**

In the context of quality provision in childcare, one of the most important developments has been the establishment of CECDE. It was established by the Minister for Education and Science together with the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. The CECDE was launched in October 2002 to develop and co-ordinate Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ireland in pursuance of the objectives of the White Paper '*Ready to Learn*' (DES, 1999). This remit was comprehensive, focusing on all care and education settings for children from birth to six years of age, bridging many of the traditional

divides between education and care and between the early year's settings and the formal education system.

The core function of the Centre was to produce a National Quality Framework for Quality (NQF) for ECCE. Within the NQF, three distinct elements were identified: (1) a set of standards to define what was understood by quality for children in the Irish context; (2), a system of inspection or assessment to ensure that quality was achieved and maintained and (3) an infrastructure implemented to support all those working in the ECCE sector to accomplish the quality as prescribed in the standards.

In the *'Talking about Quality'* report on consultations Duignan and Walsh (2004) outline that the objectives of the CECDE are:

- To develop a national quality framework for early childhood education
- To develop targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are educationally disadvantaged or have special needs and
- To prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency and to advise the Department of Education and Science on policy issues in the area.

Following on, CECDE conducted a number of consultative seminars on the issue of *'Quality in early childhood care and education.'* This was in keeping with the Centre's brief to develop national quality standards "in the areas identified in the White Paper (curriculum and methodology, equipment and materials, staff and qualifications) and in relation to parental involvement." (CECDE, 2001: 4). Consultation with all stakeholders, including parents and guardians, children, teachers and carers, policymakers and practitioners was a key element in this process. In their report: *Talking about Quality* Duignan and Walsh (2004) outline the details about how the consultations took place. Participants were requested to complete a short feedback form, focusing the discussion around three central issues:

- Defining Quality
- Assessing Quality

- Supporting Quality

The primary focus of the consultative seminars was to gain the insights and perspectives of all stakeholders in the ECCE sector in relation to quality. Consultation was a core value of the CECDE; as is stated in their Programme of Work, "*Consultation with stakeholders will be a crucial part of the process of developing quality standards.*" (CECDE, 2001: 4). The consultative seminars provided the key information and insights to continue the process of devising a National Framework for Quality (NQF) for all settings attended by children from birth to six years. Various issues were discussed under each of the three central issues.

The consultation on questions of quality in ECCE revealed that there was a valuable pool of experience and expertise, which would support and inform the development of the NQF. Participants in the seminars were articulate, informed and constructive in their comments and expressed a general welcome for the need for and development of a NQF. Synthesis of responses under the three main questions of quality revealed a number of core elements of quality under which development was focused (Walsh and Duignan, 2004).

In 2004 Walsh and Duignan published a report *Insights on Quality* on early childhood care and education (ECCE) to the sector. This publication marked the culmination of an extensive literature review pertaining to the theme of quality in ECCE in Ireland from 1990 to 2004. They found that there was a sustained and continued interest in the topic of quality in ECCE in Ireland. This national review focused on the issue of quality from three distinct, yet interrelated aspects, namely: Policy, Practice Research. The key objective of this exercise was to extract implications for the development of the NQF. Findings and conclusions noted that a national strategy should be developed towards the promotion of quality ECCE services in Ireland.

In addition, in 2004, Schonfeld, Kiernan and Walsh edited a report titled *Making Connections - A Review of International Policies, Practices and Research Relating to Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education*. In consultation with the CECDE, the Centre for Social and Educational Research (CSER) chose seven countries for inclusion within the review. These were chosen to attain a good representation of particular models of ECCE provision internationally. The report concluded with a

synthesis of the common themes from the cross-national review and an outline of the implications of the findings for the development of the NQF in the Irish context. The implications included the need for a coordinated policy framework, the use of a broad and flexible definition of quality, the engagement of all stakeholders, the provision of adequate pre-service and in-service training and an adequate support infrastructure to assist implementation.

In 2005, Fallon edited the discussion paper: *Early Childhood in Ireland - Evidence and Perspectives*. This document was the last of the four pillars of research, which the CECDE put in place to support the development of the NQF. It encapsulates the perspective from which the child's interests are being incorporated into the NQF. It articulates well with the National Children's Strategy, *Our Children, Their Lives* (DHC, 2000) and *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* (NCCA, 2004). These four documents provided considerable evidence on the constituent elements of quality provision from a broad range of complementary perspectives. Over the past decade or so, against the background of a rapidly changing socio-economic and demographic landscape, there have been significant modernising developments in relation to policy towards young children. These developments are reflected in such seminal documents as the National Childcare Strategy (DJELR, 1999), the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, *Ready to Learn* (DES, 1999a) and the National Children's Strategy, *Our Children, Their Lives* (DHC, 2000). In addition, as referred to earlier, the consultation document on early learning, *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* (NCCA, 2004) has added to the matrix of policy on young children (Fallon, 2005).

The CECDE has held two International Conferences: *Questions of Quality* in 2004 and *Vision into Practice* in 2007. The conference papers can be accessed on their website [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie) together with their publications, policy submission, databases on early childhood care and education and their library with many publications pertaining to early childhood care and education in Ireland.

Among others the following research reports have been conducted by CECDE which relate to quality provision in early childhood care and education:

Mahony and Hayes (2006) reported on: *In Search of Quality: Multiple Perspectives*. The aim of this project was to provide a greater understanding of quality in the Irish context and in particular to access multiple perspectives on the meaning of quality within a variety of ECCE settings in Ireland. The CSER was contracted to conduct the research on behalf of the CECDE. Established in 1997, the CSER is a research and development centre committed to improving the quality of life of children, families and society. The CSER works to achieve this through applied research and through the development of a greater understanding of the needs of local communities (Hanlon and Hayes, 2004). They noted that the quality of early education settings varied enormously in Ireland reflecting the *ad hoc* nature of developments in this sector. The research provided an insight into the values and belief-systems of those people with a stake in ECCE in Ireland. Based on an ecological approach, the report examined the multiple systems within which the child develops and the ECCE setting was located through direct observation, interviews and a detailed review of current literature, policy developments and discourse in the field.

The CECDE promotes and facilitates the inclusion of parents in early childhood care and education settings, particularly focusing on the provision of services to educationally disadvantaged children and those with special needs. In 2004 on behalf of CECDE the CSER conducted a project to address the needs of educationally disadvantaged children or children who have special needs. It aimed to focus on the development of a Framework and Guidelines to assist in identifying indicators of risk of educational disadvantage among rural infants and toddlers and to identify strategies, processes and interventions to counteract this risk at individual, family and community level. Established in 1997, the CSER is a research and development centre committed to improving the quality of life of children, families and society. The CSER works to achieve this through applied research and through the development of a greater understanding of the needs of local communities (Hanlon and Hayes, 2004). Recommendations from the study were based on what parents acknowledged to be important strategies needing to be addressed to improve the overall wellbeing of rural families with birth-to-three-year-olds (Hanlon and Hayes, 2004).

In addition, CECDE has responsibility for developing targeted interventions, on a pilot basis, for children with special needs, for example one of the targeted projects

developed in 2004 by CECDE and the Department for Education and Science (DES), was the research project *Synergy*. *Synergy* provides evidence that the key factors promoting successful experiences of quality early intervention constitute a synergetic process; a mutually advantageous conjunction of distinct elements, of parents, carers, educators and therapists. The project consisted of a nine-month qualitative and quantitative exploration of quality early intervention for children with special needs in diverse rural settings in North Tipperary and was conducted by Cederman (2006). The purpose of this project was to offer a high quality intervention to children from birth to six years with special needs in a variety of settings. The conclusions and recommendations from this project noted that the relationship between early intervention and early childhood settings was highly significant for children with special needs in North Tipperary. The conclusions reflected each of the objectives in terms of those factors contributing to quality early intervention, pedagogic practices, strengths and weaknesses of settings in supporting learning needs, transition, and the assessment and recording of children's progress (Cederman, 2006).

Furthermore, Duignan and Fallon (2004) published their report: *On Target? An Audit of Provision of Services Targeting Disadvantage and Special Needs Among Children from birth to six years in Ireland*. This report presented an overview of services in Ireland, which target the needs of young children with disabilities and of those who experience disadvantage. The findings were used to generate recommendations for policies in early childhood care and education in Ireland. While data on provision was not available in a planned or systematic way, the CECDE assembled a database of approximately 1,400 services, illustrated via maps.

Also in May 2005 the Department of Education and Science (DES) launched a new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion entitled "DEIS" (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools). The Action Plan was the outcome of a review of existing support programmes that were in place to support children and young people aged 3-18 years from disadvantaged areas. Following this review DEIS sought to co-ordinate existing programmes that had been successful in addressing educational disadvantage. These programmes were the basis on which a number of new supports were introduced. One of the new School Support Programmes (SSP) proposed was to target early childhood education provision and strengthen supports. It was this strand of the



DEIS Action Plan that required the assistance of the CECDE. Research under the headings of needs analysis findings included: Expert Advice, Training, Parental Involvement and Information. The research carried out by the CECDE in relation to the Early Education Provision strand of DEIS, has enabled the Centre to assist the Early Years Education Policy Unit within the DES to develop a number of proposals to address the needs of the identified preschools.

Furthermore, in 2006 CECDE conducted the study *Early Years Provision for Children from Birth to Six Years with Special Needs in Two Geographical Areas in Ireland*. Two distinct geographical regions, one urban and one rural, were selected for the study in order to sample the diversity of services available for children up to six years of age. Kelleher, Mc Gough and Ware (2006) noted that *The National Forum for Early Childhood Education* (1998) was a significant milestone for children with special needs. This forum afforded a unique opportunity for discussion on policy and practice for young children with special needs in the context of the wider debate on provision for all young children from birth to six years in Ireland. A direct outcome of the Forum was the publication of the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, *Ready to Learn* (Ireland, 1999) outlining Government policy in the area. Another major landmark was the passing of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (Ireland, 2004). This act, for the first time in Ireland, made the provision for young children with special needs a statutory right.

In addition, the establishment of the CECDE (2002) and of the National Council for Special Education (2004) gave practical expression to the aspirations and intentions outlined by policy makers and have provided the institutional mechanisms through which to steer policy into practice.

This study found that provision for young children with disabilities and for children at risk for reasons of socio-economic disadvantage is seriously lacking in quality along a range of dimensions, including the provision of appropriate curriculum and teaching. In addition they found that there is an urgent need for the development, implementation and evaluation of model demonstration programmes, which would afford much needed insights into best practice for specific groups of vulnerable children (Kelleher, McGough and Ware 2006).

The above research laid the preparation for the National Quality Framework (NQF).



On 30 May 2006, CECDE launched *Síolta*, the NQF for Early Childhood Education in Ireland. The launch had been the culmination of a three-year process, which involved consultation with more than 50 diverse organisations, representing childcare workers, teachers, parents, policy makers, researchers and other interested parties, which were united by a vision and purpose to establish the best possible learning environment for young children in Ireland. *Síolta* is a quality assurance programme that has been developed by the CECDE, in consultation with the wider early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector in Ireland (Duignan *et al* 2007).

In acknowledging the significant changes in the field of early childhood education and care in Ireland over the last decade is the investment in a National Training Initiative and the publication of another major practice document which will have the potential to impact on early education practice in Ireland: *The Framework for Early Learning* (forthcoming), a national curriculum including practice guidelines for early education in Ireland. It is being developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Hayes and Kernan, 2008:1, 5).

Donohoe and Gaynor (2007:46) while speaking about quality in the early years assert that definitions of quality must take account of agreed quality indicators such as those set out in *Síolta* – The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (NQF) 2006. This means that defining quality is a process rather than an end, a process which is ongoing and which involves continuous self-evaluations. High quality in an early years setting is evident in:

- The ethos or underpinning values
- The adults and the relationships involved and
- The curriculum and the environment within which it is offered

(To view the Underlying principles of *Síolta* See Donohoe and Gaynor (2007:47)).

Furthermore, in *The Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990-2006* (Second edition) Walsh and Cassidy (2006) describe numerous research studies depicting quality, for example:

They note that the quality of ECCE services has come to the fore of Irish policy and practice in recent years. Recent developments, for example the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) (2000-2006), and the establishment of the County Child Care Committees (CCCs) and the CECDE, has provided a renewed impetus for the development of quality in the Irish context. They note that research is of critical importance to ensure that the development of the sector in quantitative terms is accompanied by a concomitant emphasis on the quality of the experiences provided for the youngest children in ECCE settings. They assert that the theme of Quality within ECCE services is comprised of research that is generic in nature rather than specific to any of the sixteen national Standards of *Siolta*. It consists of 113 publications, which have been divided into the following sub-themes following a process of thematic analysis:

- Quality – Developing Policy [37]
- Quality – Developing Practice [16]
- Quality Assurance/ Improvement Programmes [30]
- Defining Quality [6]
- Assessing Quality [15]
- Supporting Quality [9]

Source: (Walsh and Cassidy, 2006).

It is evident from the above research from CECDE that quality provision has improved greatly in Ireland.

As of September 2008 the government has ceased funding the work of CECDE, deeming that it had completed the mandate for which it was established.

### **Summary**

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) has been instrumental in enhancing quality provision in early childhood care and education. They have completed numerous research projects, which have been useful for the implementation of policies, for example the National Quality Framework (NQF).

### **2.2.11 FINANCE, TAX BREAKS AND CHILDCARE IN IRELAND**

Evidence suggests that parents who decide to stay at home with their children are penalised by the tax system of this present government. Byrne (2007:17) in a paper on Tax individualisation: *Time for a Critical Re-think* says: 'the current different treatment of one-income and two-income married couples cannot be justified. The current system unfairly discriminates against the spouse who does not wish to enter the workforce. It also discriminates unfairly against a two-income married couple, one of whom wishes to work in the home for a variety of reasons: to care for children or other dependants, to care for an elderly relative, to further their education, to take an extended career break not to mention a multitude of other scenarios'.

As is evident this does not allow for parents to make their own decisions about their families, because they are directed by the government through taxation policy. This makes parents very aware that everything comes at a high cost in life. This was summed up by Ryan (2005) while commenting on the Barnardo's Annual Review (2004-05). He discusses how these days we hear about the cost of things that, when we were growing up, didn't come with a price tag. Time is a commodity as never before, community is a luxury item and conversation is a text message – usually to say that you're running late. The new sins of society are house prices, childcare and community.

In addition, Hayes (2002:71) asserts that: 'the 'childcare problem' has been around as a serious issue for parents and children in Ireland since the mid-1970's; it is precisely because there has been insufficient debate about the nature of the impact of changes in the economic and social systems on families and their children that there has been

such an unco-ordinated, reactive and fragmented response to addressing the issue; a childcare policy directed from the perspective of the rights of the child would recognise it as a service of potential value to all children rather than simply an intervention strategy for the disadvantaged’.

Furthermore, Barnardo's are determined to emphasise that their strategy is to value all children and young people. In 2005 Barnardo's launched its new Strategy and outlined its mission and vision which is a simple proposition: They want an Ireland where childhood is valued and all children and young people are cherished equally (Finlay, 2005b). In 2007, Barnardo's published its survey about attitudes towards childhood – the attitudes of parents, and the attitudes of young people themselves (Finlay 2007c).

Furthermore, the following two organisations are examples of those which give support to children and their families. Archways is a Dublin based organization that delivers prevention and intervention programmes to children and teenagers with behavioral and emotional difficulties. Now they are running the *Incredible Years training programme* which is designed to treat and prevent emotional and behavioral problem in children aged between 3 and 10 (Archways).

In addition, the Organisation Mondiale pour l'Education Prescolaire OMEP (Ireland) is a registered charity dedicated to working for children's needs in Early Education and Care. OMEP (Ireland) is affiliated to OMEP – the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education. This is an international, non-governmental organisation, founded in 1948 to benefit children under the age of 8 years throughout the world. OMEP is currently established in over 70 countries and has a consultative status with UNESCO, UNICEF, the Council of Europe and other international organisations. The aim of OMEP is to promote for all children the optimum conditions that will ensure their well-being, development and happiness in their families, institutions and communities. The objective of *OMEP (Ireland)* is to use every possible means to promote the optimum conditions for the well-being of all children, their development and happiness within their families, institutions, and society (OMEP Ireland).

The National Committee of OMEP in Ireland was founded in 1966 and since its foundation it has been active in areas of relevance to the quality of life of the young child. To this end, OMEP assists any undertaking to improve early childhood education, and supports scientific research that can influence these conditions (Hayes, 1999:15).

From the above, we see that the Irish Government taxation policies can make difficulties for working parents paying for childcare, despite the subvention for under-sixes mentioned earlier. A number of voluntary organisations are working to improve policy and provision in the area of childcare.

### **2.2.12. FINANCE, TAX BREAKS AND CHILDCARE IN THE UK**

The arrival of the Government's '*Work and Families Bill*' (2005) has strengthened employment rights for mothers and fathers. Fathers will be entitled to up to three months paid paternity leave if the child's mother returns to work after six months but before her maternity leave is up. The Government aims to increase paid maternity leave again to one year and to introduce the new rights for fathers by 2008 if feasible (UK. Work and Families Bill 2005).

Furthermore, Mike Emmott (2007), adviser for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development said: 'UK paternity provision is pretty generous by international standards - at least on duration if not amount. We are certainly not lagging if you compare us with Scandinavian countries that are usually at the top of the tree. If you look at France and Germany it's pretty good and we compare favourably in terms of length of paid leave for fathers now available.'

### **2.2.13. FINANCE, TAX BREAKS AND CHILDCARE IN DENMARK**

Denmark provides great assistance and support to families.

In looking at Denmark, a study, (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2004) noted in 2002, that paid maternity and parental leave following childbirth was extended from 32 weeks to a total of 52 weeks. Also in 2002, discussions were held

about 'Work Life Balance' and the Part-time Work Act (June, 2002), which states that there should be access to "family-friendliness" for all, which should not be restricted to parents with small children. Older employees and employees with no children or with older children may also need flexibility. As regards childcare the Danish government encourages employers to participate in childcare provision by contracting childcare places for their employees in subsidised childcare centres. Childcare is seen as a fringe benefit of most collective agreements (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2004).

Furthermore, in Denmark, subsidised childcare is available to parents.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Denmark is provided by access to subsidised child care, which is available to working parents at all income ranges and government per-child subsidies are high. The Danish system, largely government provided, is made up of crèches for the under-3s, kindergartens for the 3-6 year group (mostly full day), and some age-integrated centres. Support to families with children is granted by way of services allocated on the principle that anyone in need should have equal right to the services and by way of financial assistance to all families with children or assistance in special cases (OECDd, 2001).

Danish social and family policy enables parents to choose from various child-care options, enabling families to select the form of childcare that best suits them by striking a balance between work and family life.

Like the US, each year Denmark uses an information-gathering system and collates figures concerning childcare services. At the Danish National Centre for Social Research (Undated), Denmark's Statistik (statistical office) collates figures concerning social affairs, including figures concerning the number of day-care facilities, places, children, staff and rates relating to daycare facilities (*dagtilbud*) for children. The figures are published in the Social Research Statistics (Danish National Centre for Social Research website).

Childcare services and facilities in Denmark could be envied by other developed countries. Incorporating childcare into the infrastructure of family policies in Ireland

would benefit Irish parents. A need exists for a long-term, coherent and sustained approach involving all areas of planning and governance (NESF, report 31: 2005:53).

Unlike the countries mentioned here, in Sweden, childcare is part of the educational system.

#### **2.2.14 FINANCE, TAX BREAKS AND CHILDCARE IN SWEDEN**

Unlike the countries mentioned already, in Sweden, childcare is part of the educational system.

Korpi (2004) says that: 'Swedish National Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Policy Public childcare is of high quality combining education and care, (general welfare model)'. It is universal and accessible for all children; It expanded with the aim of providing full coverage (1970-95). It was organised so that parents could combine parenthood with work or study, it is provided by the municipalities, and financed mainly out of public funds, it has been integrating ECEC as part of lifelong learning since 1996.

#### **2.2.15 FINANCE, TAX BREAKS AND CHILDCARE IN ITALY**

Like Sweden, childcare facilities are also well developed in Italy as shown in the following example.

Since 1963, the municipality of Reggio Emilia in Italy began setting up its own network of educational services for children from birth to 6 years; it is called the 'Reggio approach'. Abbott and Nutbrown (2005: 1) assert that the experience of Reggio Emilia, in providing challenges to accepted approaches to early childhood education in many countries, is widely acknowledged. Experiencing Reggio Emilia's provision for young children offers wonderful practical ideas: for example, drawing on acetate over light-boxes, using photographic slides in play, revising children's language and drawings, and working in groups on projects over time. These are simple practical realisations of other more profound theories about children and their learning, of views of children as strong, powerful, competent learners with the right to an environment, which is integral to the learning experience.



The pedagogical experience of Reggio Emilia is a story so far spanning more than 40 years that can be described as a pedagogical experiment in a whole community. The early childhood services of Reggio Emilia insist on the importance of viewing public services as first and foremost a public space and as a site for ethical and political practice – a place of encounter, interaction and connections among citizens in a community; a place where relationships combine a profound respect for otherness and difference with a deep sense of responsibility for the other, a place of profound interdependency. In their work, the teachers of Reggio have struggled to realise the emancipatory potential of democracy, by giving each child possibilities to function as an active citizen and to have the possibility of a good life in a democratic community (Rinaldi, 2007: 1-10).

Public childcare for infants and toddlers is locally controlled and very inconsistent, so that women face strong incentives to leave the work force for most of their childrearing years and face severe practical difficulties if they do not. Public policy also reflects the assumption that women will have access to men's wages through marriage, as child benefits are low. Italy's financial provisions for families are relatively low in the scheme of provisions of other European countries. The value of tax breaks and child benefits for a couple with two children is equal to about four percent of the average 1992 male wage, less than half the value of French benefits. Italy's child poverty rate is 14.1 percent, close to the US rate of 14.7 percent, while in the rest of Europe rates are under five percent everywhere except the United Kingdom (eight percent), Germany (six percent), and Spain (seven percent) (Henneck, 2003).

#### **2.2.16. FINANCE, TAX BREAKS AND CHILDCARE IN CANADA**

Like in Italy, very little money is spent on childcare in Canada.

The new federal government has promised to introduce legislation that would lead to the development of an early childcare and education (ECCE) system in Canada. This is welcome news. Despite public proclamations on the importance of early childhood education Canada spends significantly less on early childcare and developmental programmes (approximately half of 1% of GDP) than that spent in countries such as France, Sweden and Denmark that have highly developed systems (Goelman, 2004b).



The following report concurs that day care is not well developed yet in Canada.

The Organisation for economic co-operation and development (OECD) 2006 report regarding childcare in Canada states: 'While Canada is one of the OECD's wealthy countries, not only is our Early Learning Child Care (ELCC), situation very poor but our provision for other supports for families and children – paid maternity/parental leave and other social programs – is limited too' (OECD, 2006a: 12).

Canada was placed last out of 14 countries in public spending on early learning and childcare. This research makes clear that with regard to ELCC, they have a long way to go to begin to achieve the equity, social justice and enlightened self-interest that most Canadians appear to want: 'Other than Quebec, there has been no significant expansion of the system in Canada over the past decade'. Less than 20% of children aged 0-6 years find a place in a regulated service compared to, for example, Belgium 63%; Denmark 78%; France 69%; Portugal 40%; U.K. 60%' (OECD, 2006a).

Furthermore, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates in British Columbia, Canada (CCCABC) notes that more women are working than ever before in Canada: more than 1.021 million women were working as of January 2006. Public spending for Early Learning and Child Care ranges between 0.2% to 2% of GDP for 0-6 years. With Canada being the lowest spender, 14th out of the 14 countries for which these data is provided it means that - Less than 20% of children aged 0-6 years find a place in a regulated service (compared to Belgium 63%; Denmark 78%; France 69%; Portugal 40%; and U.K. 60%) (Coalition of Child Care Advocates in British Columbia, Canada, 2007).

Childcare in Ireland as in these other countries can be seen as a political issue and as noted by Fine-Davis (2002: 55) when discussing issues of consistent quality in childcare in Ireland, 'Were there a national programme of public childcare facilities, consistent high quality could be guaranteed'.

## **Summary**

Organisations like OMEP, Barnardo's and CECDE have advanced and highlighted the childcare policy and provision issues in Ireland in recent years and have made great progress on the ground.

Childcare in Ireland as in other countries can be seen as a political issue and as noted by Fine-Davis (2002: 55) when discussing issues of consistent quality in childcare in Ireland, 'Were there a national programme of public childcare facilities, consistent high quality could be guaranteed'.

In the UK they have made advances in childcare policy and provision, in Denmark they have well established provision as well as in Sweden and Italy, whereas there is scope for improvement in Canada.

To date, an enormous amount of research has been done and much progress has been made with regard to early childhood care and quality provision, however much remains to be done in Ireland. In comparison, other countries like Sweden have well developed systems (Melhuish and Petrogiannis, 2006:172).

## **2.3 ATTACHMENT**

Owing to the large numbers of children in childcare, attachment is an important aspect to be considered.

Attachment is an enduring emotional connection between people that produces a desire for continual contact as well as feeling of distress during separation (Berger, 2001 cited in (Catherwood and Gillibrand, 2004:82).

### **2.3.1 EARLY ATTACHMENTS**

Gillibrand cited in Catherwood and Gillibrand (2004:81-98), explains that babies aged two-three months will often smile at adults but best with their parents. During this phase an infant is unable to communicate verbally whether she or he needs

nourishment or warmth, security or comfort and it is up to the parents to decipher the infant's facial expressions and sounds to determine what the infant needs. By spending time and watching and playing with their babies parents can develop an understanding of their babies' needs and moods, this period is called synchrony. Synchrony occurs during the first year of life and mostly before the child is able to talk. As the child gets older, the relationships that occur between the child and parents are called attachments. Attachments are characterised by demonstrating the need to be near and touching the parent. This is proximity seeking behaviour and contact maintaining behaviour is where the child reaches out and wants to touch the parent as the parents puts the child into the baby cot or chair (Catherwood and Gillibrand, 2004:82). Early theorists believed that children were born with an ability to form attachments; this was seen as having survival value for the infant. Survival value entails any activity or provision that provides warmth, food, air, water and security and it encourages the survival of an infant or a group. The formation of attachments was originally thought not to be influenced by the child, but was considered very much the responsibility of the parents. More recent theorists are suggesting that both the parent and the child are active participants in the attachment process (Catherwood and Gillibrand, 2004: 83).

### **2.3.2 PSYCHONALATIC THEORIES**

Freud (1856-1939) proposed Psychoanalytic theory and argued that during infancy all behaviours are aimed at gaining pleasure and avoiding pain; he called this the pleasure principle. The unconscious part of the psyche, the id, the ego and the superego play a key part in these principles. He discussed three stages: Oral, Anal, Phallic. Freud asserted that successful completion of the three stages meant that a child had formed a strong attachment to both parents, which would ensure the child forming strong attachments with other people they would meet as well as forming strong healthy attachments in adult life. However, if the child was stressed or fixated at any of the stages this would result in them regressing in adult life, for example a boy that fixated at the phallic stage may show macho aggressive sexuality or an excessive striving for career potency (Catherwood and Gillibrand, 2004: 83). It can be argued that children going into childcare at an early age may not have the opportunity

to fully resolve all the stages. This in turn may result in them being aggressive and angry which could manifest as anti-social behaviour in the childcare facility/at school. Erikson (1902-1994) proposed eight life-span stages. While agreeing with Freud's notion of the mother being important in the development of the attachment, he suggested that the child had many and varied needs. Eriksson's first stage is Trust vs. mis-trust and it is where the parent identifies the needs of the child and the child begins to trust the parent, which causes the child to form a deep attachment with the parent. This theory suggests that if the child did not form a trusting relationship with the parent before being put into non-parental childcare at an early age then this could result in the child having problems with trusting other people. This in turn would result in the child not being able to overcome the next stage autonomy vs. shame and doubt. This could show the child having low self esteem and having no confidence in themselves, which is, reflected in future attachments. But as with Freud's theory, it is difficult to prove (Catherwood and Gillibrand, 2004: 83).

### **2.3.3 LEARNING, ETHOLOGICAL AND SECURITY THEORISTS**

A different view to psychoanalytic theory is learning theory. Learning theorists believed the needs of the child to be biological and by satisfying the biological needs the child would form attachment to the parent. Harlow (1958) described his primary drive theory by doing tests with infant monkeys showing that monkey's need food, warmth comfort and security from the parent.

Lorenz (1903-1989) was the founder of applying ethological theories to attachments. He observed goslings that followed him after hatching, he called this imprinting. He noticed it was innate and occurred within a critical time shortly after birth/hatching and the attachments made were irreversible. However, Lorenz pointed out that human infants do not show imprinting; they take much longer to attach to humans. If Lorenz's views are true we must look at the importance of attachments made with the mother at the critical time, which will lead to a strong emotional relationship. Furthermore, Lorenz asserts that if attachment has not occurred a good relationship will not form, so how can a good relationship form owing to the child going into childcare at four months old? Tests to establish this were done by Klaus and Kennell (1976, 1982) who worked with mothers and babies who were kept together and who were separated at birth. They claimed that extra mother-child contact in the very first

few days of the baby's life can influence the long-term mother-child relationship (Catherwood and Gillibrand, 2004: 83).

Furthermore Perry (undated) also asserts that a solid and healthy attachment with a primary caregiver appears to be associated with a high probability of healthy relationships with others, while poor attachment with the mother or primary caregiver appears to be associated with a host of emotional and behavioural problems later in life.

Moreover, Fahlberg, (2004:13-25), asserts that attachment has been defined as 'an affectionate bond between two individuals that endures through space and time and serves to join them emotionally'. When children have a strong attachment to a parent, it allows them to develop both trust for others and self-reliance. Fahlberg notes how attachment between humans is a complex process and how attachments develop and function is not yet completely understood. However, it is essential that those who participate in making major decisions about the lives of children and families have a basic understanding of attachment theory. Attachment and separation are the heart of childcare work.

However, anecdotal evidence would suggest that babies who have had limited contact with their mothers for any reason are capable of forming attachments. Certainly children who are adopted will often demonstrate attachment for their adoptive mothers and fathers so does this critical period truly exist? (Catherwood and Gillibrand, 2004: 91).

#### **2.3.4 APPLICATION OF ATTACHMENT THEORIES**

Bowlby (1970-1990) applied some of Lorenz's ideas on attachment to develop his theories of human emotional development. Bowlby was very interested in the emotional attachments that humans make by taking into account both the role of the child and the parents in forming emotional attachments. He agreed with the previous theorists about infants having a strong instinctual predisposition to develop an attachment to their primary carer (usually the mother) but considered the reciprocal nature of the parent-child relationship vital in the development of further emotional attachments. Bowlby does not rely on a critical period following birth for the development of attachment. Other tests studies suggesting no critical period following

birth for development of strong bonds between mother and baby were conducted by Carlson, Fagerberg, Horneman and Hwang (1978) in Sweden and by Svejda, Campos and Emde (1980). Unlike Klaus and Kennell (1976, 1982) they showed that there is no critical time for forming a bond between mother and baby. Bowlby suggested that we have the capacity to form many emotional relationships in life (Catherwood and Gillibrand, 2004: 93). This proves to be valuable because in childcare facilities the children could be having some staff changeovers and it would be good for them to be able to form many attachments.

Bowlby studied children separated from parents during the Second World War, looking at attachment, and the effects of separation and loss, which he called Maternal Deprivation (Bowlby, 1969; 1982). Bowlby (1944) correlates adolescent delinquency with separation in childhood, showing how the glassy detachment of the 'affectionless psychopath' develops from childhood trauma when the grieving child was driven to the defensive exclusion of almost all attachment processes. It is essential for children to start off with a secure base.

Winnicott (1986) corroborates this evidence about attachment by demonstrating with experiments in a park. He gave the child a base that they could go from and come back to. If the child was secure, they would look at the parents and come back after a distance (12 feet) away, unless they are tempted to stray and get lost. If they were not securely attached they would wander off and get lost, as children get lost for example, in shopping centres. This is because they do not know where their secure base is or they may want to get lost. It is an internal, emotional base and it raises the issue that nowadays children may be missing out on secure attachments. Furthermore, in his book '*Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*' Rutter (1991:143) makes the distinction between secure and insecure bonding. He notes that one of the characteristics of bonding is that it enables children to feel secure in strange situations. The apparent 'purpose' of bonding is to give the child security of relationships in order to stop clinging and following, and in that sense to become detached eventually.

Furthermore, Hughes, (2007:1-36) notes that from an attachment perspective, a central purpose of the family is to facilitate the development of both its members and also the functioning of the family as a whole. This is achieved through a secure

base/safe haven in which and from which each member is able to begin to form a coherent autobiographical narrative. There is an enormous importance of attachment, security and intersubjective experiences in the psychological development of all members of the family, and especially the child. The impact of these twin experiences permeates the child's physical, affective, behavioural, cognitive, and social development. When they are compromised all aspects of the child's development are placed at risk.

At a certain level, for example when children are very young, it can be argued that there may be a gap in attachment and a loss to both the parents and the children. What will these children have to pass onto their children? It can be argued that because of children being in childcare from a young age, these children are not centred when they do not get that 'secure base' from the start.

### **2.3.5 ATTACHMENT TESTS**

Shaffer and Emerson (1964) conducted studies on babies and discussed three stages of attachment (1) the anti-social phase, (2) the phase of indiscriminate attachments and (3) The specific attachments phase. At this stage the child is seven to nine months old and no longer cries but protests by clinging when separated from the mother. This is demonstrating separation anxiety. Shaffer and Emerson's work allows for understanding on progression from being attached to our mothers to forming attachments to fathers, family friends and grandparents. It does not tell us about the different styles of relationships with these people.

Ainsworth discussed secure, insecure-avoidant, ambivalent and insecure-disorganised/disoriented attachments between the child and its mother. Her tests became known as 'the strange situation' (Ainsworth and Bell, 1970: 49-67). Ainsworth's theories of attachment were groundbreaking in furthering our understanding of the development of social relationships. She employed rigid experimental techniques in the study of attachment behaviour. Tests were carried out in a controlled laboratory setting but the same results were replicated in the home and the results remain the same, thus lending support to the work on attachment (Catherwood and Gillibrand, 2004: 93).



Goldberg (2000:247) asks what aspect of subsequent care makes a difference to attachments. Goldberg notes that early attachments does not by any means 'determine' later development, but rather it makes a unique contribution along with other influences. Proponents of attachment examined these findings and argued that this is consistent with theoretical predictions. Critics of attachment, for example, Goldberg (2000) argue that this undermines the theory – attachment is far less important than Bowlby and his early followers thought. Bowlby himself argued both for and against determinism – change is always possible, but change is also constrained by prior adaptation. An analogy reflecting this position (Sroufe, 1997) is that of the branches of a tree. One may arrive at many different end points from a given starting point, and there are opportunities to cross from one main limb to another via smaller branches. However, the further out one moves on a particular limb, the less likelihood there is of crossing to other limbs. Thus a particular infant attachment pattern does not determine the end point but weights the likelihood of reaching one end point compared to the other (Goldberg 2000: 247).

Goldberg (2000: 242) considered two factors outside the family that can influence the formation of attachments: the effects of maternal employment outside the home and the cultural context in which families live. In settings where maternal employment outside the family is highly valued, as in the Kibbutz in Israel, the social structure is organised to provide forms of care for children. Where exclusive maternal care is valued by the culture, for example in Japan there are few alternatives to full-time mothering; an example of this is found in Northern Germany where the culture of maternal care is supported by the government financial support for two years (Spangler and Schieche, 1998). Although the pattern traditionally considered to indicate secure attachment appears to pre-dominate in all of the culture studied in their project: Northern Germany, USA, Japan and Kibbutz, there are shifts in the type of security and insecurity that are related to cultural expectations and interpretations of desirable child care and behaviour. (Goldberg, 2000: 245). These examples show how most cultures appear to value attachments but different cultures may value it for different reasons and it appears to work in all cultures.

A longitudinal study by Sroufe, Egeland and Collins (2008) reports on the following research:



The Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children involves the complementary study of normal and abnormal development. The longitudinal approach allows study of continuity and change from infancy forward. One emphasis has been to outline the changing nature of peer competence from early childhood through adolescence. Tests of this idea include showing that foundations add to current contexts in predicting pathology and that troubled children having positive early foundations are more likely to recover than troubled children who do not. The obverse case is also true. Children with histories of anxious attachment who are functioning well are more likely to have problems in adolescence than are other well-functioning children (Sroufe *et al*, 2008).

### **2.3.6 PROMOTING SECURE ATTACHMENTS**

Some children may benefit from attending a day care centre/childcare facility as opposed to being at home with their parent/parents if the home is of a dysfunctional nature. When serious emotional abuse has been recognised, and where child-development has been seriously affected by that abuse, the provision of day care is of considerable importance for, and benefit to, the child. Quality provision in early childhood care and education means that childcare facilities are providing excellent services for children. In Ireland as in the UK early years educators at every level need to understand the changing policy context, which is bringing new opportunities and new challenges to their work. Among the ideas which underpin the approaches to practice are recognising children's rights; promoting high quality, creative play, integrating care and education; ensuring responsive, individualised attention; involving mothers and fathers and combating all forms of discrimination (Goldschmed and Jackson, 2005:19). All these factors constitute the model of child development proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conceptual framework proved a useful starting point for multivariate systems research in which family considerations became secondary to the design of institution-based social programmes focusing on children. The following gives a view of the psychoanalytic perspective on infancy:

Bremner, Slater, and Butterworth (1997:288) explains that the psychoanalytic perspective on infancy sets the pattering of infants' inter-subjective experience at the

centre of a theory of social development, a theory that also has important implications for the development of personality and certain cognitive abilities. This theory holds that there are innately given configurations of interpersonal experience that are foundational for, rather than subservient upon, a cognitively elaborated understanding of the nature of persons with minds. It also suggest that specific forms of insufficiently sensitive care giving may result in infants failing to integrate person-related experiences, with far-reaching effects on the structuring of those individuals' subsequent interpersonal relations, capacity for coherent thinking, personality and psychiatric status.

Beaver, Jones, Brewster, Keane, Neaum, and Tallack (2002: 276) notes that there is not a simple instinctive urge that binds mothers and carers and their babies and how many psychologists now believe that human infants are born with skills that allow them to attract and keep someone's attention; they appear to be programmed to become aware of, and to respond to others around them. They seem to prefer things that are human, like voices and faces. From an early age, babies give out strong signals that draw a person to them, and make them respond, for example, crying, smiling and grasping. Furthermore, meeting children's needs encourages a better attachment to develop. The success and the intensity of the attachment does not, however, depend on the amount of time the carer spends with the infant, but rather on the quality of that involvement (Beaver *et al* 2002: 280).

Furthermore, Abbott and Moylett (2007:4) assert that '*people under three*', are not babies, toddlers or even children, but people with rights which include being treated with dignity and respect. This has been made clear too by Article 2 (1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it states:

1. The States Parties to the present Convention shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parents' or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians or family members.

Moreover, in *The All – Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution, Tenth Progress Report: The Family* (2006:123) it states that:

The committee found that now more than ever previously there is a sharp public concern to ensure that all children in the state are treated equally and protected closely and that the state should extend all the supports that it reasonably can to ensure that the best interests of the child are paramount in matters affecting the child's welfare.

In addition, Bruce (2006: 130) discusses '*Play Matters*'. Bruce notes that 'So often in life the things that matter most are the most difficult to understand; Play is just such a process; its workings are often hidden, subtle and sophisticated in the way it impacts on development and learning'. Bruce's Twelve Features of Free-Flow Play (Bruce, 1991) are known worldwide and continue to influence practitioners in their work across countries, communities and settings (See Abbott & Langton (2006: 131). Bruce concludes that play is for life, but children whose play flows from birth onwards are going to take aspects and components with them, using their childhood as a lifelong resource, rather than something they grow out of and lose (Bruce, 2006: 138).

Abbott (2005: 17) in *Perceptions of play – a question of priorities?* asserts that in recognition of the 'multiple intelligences' which children possess reminds us that: 'we need to throw out limiting old assumptions and respect the flexibility, creativity, adventurousness, resourcefulness and generativity of the young mind'. This is evident in the 'Reggio approach', previously mentioned in section 2.4.5.

It can be argued that attachment is a continuous process with life long implications. Attachment is never finished; it is a lifelong process and lack of attachment can cause major problems later on in the child's life. Furthermore, with women being the head

of lone parent families' children are missing out on contact with a male figure in their lives.

Prolonged separation happened years ago in Ireland when the fathers emigrated or went away to work. Nowadays family units are also breaking up for other reasons. This may result in difficulties in identity formation and may be one of the reasons behind antisocial involvement or experimentation with illegal substances. Some children get over-attached to objects e.g. Toys/Dolls. This is an attempt to compensate if the child is not firmly rooted in the family and seems needy for other things.

Parental leave policies help in the development of better attachments. Also some studies suggest that longer leaves enable mothers to more fully recover from childbirth and provide more time for mothers and their infants to establish regular, responsive patterns and close attachments (Lero, 2003). Parenting programmes could be of great benefit in assisting parents with their children.

It can be argued that it is because parents are under so much pressure from work and trying to keep all sides going, they may be tempted to give in to their children rather than tackling the problems and issues. This may lead to them being inconsistent in their interactions with their children. Once the children detect this they may keep pushing the boundaries until the parents feel that the children are taking over and out of control. This was shown on T.V by Coleman, (2007), in his RTE1 programme, *Families in Trouble*, said when working on a 6 week programme with the Thornton family, 'it is important to be consistent in setting limits and making sure they are kept'. In the programme the Thornton parents rang David Coleman (Clinical Psychologist) whenever they could not cope; he devised a strategy for them to help them cope with their six children.

Furthermore, it could be argued that all parents need support groups and would benefit from professional parenting courses, on an ongoing basis. Silver explains as follows:

Silver (2003) emphasises that the majority of attachment problems are likely due to parental ignorance about development rather than deliberate abuse; many parents are

never educated about the critical nature of the first three years of life, nor presented with positive discipline options.

In addition, a study showed that most mothers who hit their children said that they would prefer an alternative to hitting if they knew what else to do. To combat this *The Nurturing Parenting Programme*, which was created by Stephen J. Bavolek, an internationally recognised child advocate and researcher in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. The Nurturing Parenting curriculum emphasises the importance of raising children in a warm, trusting, and caring home (Nurturing Parenting Programme website).

Other parenting programmes are available; for example, The HSE (North West Area) offers a parenting course for primary school children called Fás le Cheile.

Fás le Chéile (Growing Together) is a programme for parents developed by the HSE (North West Area), which has offered training which has allowed a group of parents to complete the Certificate in Parent Support Work. This qualifies them as group leaders in parenting and, supported by the Health Promotion Service, they run parenting programmes in conjunction with their local primary schools.

Another aspect of parenting includes the type of feeding offered. It could be argued that policy on maternal leave needs to consider the benefits of breastfeeding. The research suggests as Ruhm (2002:3) states: 'Maternal employment, for example, is associated with decreases in the frequency and duration of breast-feeding. Since the consumption of human milk is linked to better health and possibly enhanced cognitive development, returning to work during the first year of a child's life may not be a desirable option for mothers'. Britton, Britton & Gronwaldt (2006) note from their study that although the quality of the dyadic interaction in infancy, rather than feeding type, is predictive of attachment security, mothers who choose to breastfeed display enhanced sensitivity during early infancy that, in turn, may foster secure attachment. Among breastfeeding mothers, higher sensitivity is associated with longer duration of breastfeeding during the first postpartum year. These findings suggest a link between attachment, security and breastfeeding.

## Summary

In summary, it is clear that theorists have changed their views from previously thinking that attachments were only to be found between the mother and child to recognising that a child can form several attachments. This is good for the many parents who may be worried about putting their children into childcare and feeling that it may interfere with their attachments.

However, all theorists agree that a strong attachment bond formed when the baby is young will be the basis for strong emotional relationships with others and for when the child becomes an adult. Furthermore, it is evident that meeting children's needs encourages a better attachment to develop. The success and the intensity of the attachment does not, however, depend on the amount of time the carer spends with the infant, but rather on the quality of that involvement. Infants develop bonds of attachment with people who spend relatively short periods of time with them, for example an hour a day. This can happen when the time is spent in certain ways: these include the carer playing with the baby, cuddling them, providing them with individual attention, involving them in conversations and generally creating a situation where both of them are enjoying each others company. The baby will have stronger attachment to this person than to someone who holds them physically for a longer period of time, but does not play or interact with them (Beaver et al 2002:280). One could question if this happens with every child in a childcare facility where there could be large numbers of children per staff member there per day. On the other hand if a mother suffered from depression a baby would not be getting enough attention and in this case it would be better for the baby to be in a childcare facility where staff are fully qualified and trained to care for children.

Also ongoing parenting courses are very helpful to aid the development of the child as well as improving quality of life for children and their parents. Extended maternity, paternity and parental leave would enhance attachment and therefore the development of children.

## **2.4 CHILDCARE ISSUES**

As is demonstrated at 2.1.10, in the past five to ten years there have been immense changes affecting parents and their children in Ireland, mainly because of the large increase of women in paid employment and the need for paid non-parental childcare.

### **2.4.1 CHANGES IN FAMILY LIFE PATTERN'S**

The dramatic shift to cohabitation as the mode of first live-in partnership (more than 70% of first partnerships) is primarily responsible for the major changes in family formation patterns, the delay in marriage and motherhood and the increase in the proportion of births outside marriage (Berthoud and Gershuny, 2001:40). The following report outlines current changes in family lifestyles.

Perel (2007) a family therapist and author of *'Mating In Captivity: Sex, Lies & Domestic Bliss'*, says that: 'Utopian romance gets blasted by the realities of family life'. Perel was giving an account of the findings from the ESRI/Royal College of Surgeons *Irish Study of Sexual Relationships* (2006) by citing the following: 'No longer is it enough for their offspring to be normal and well rounded. These days, children must be 'enriched' from babyhood with a vast array of extra-curricular activities'.

The Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships (ISSHR), the first major report of its kind was launched by the Minister for Health and Children, Mary Harney TD. The research was led by Professor Hannah McGee, Division of Population Health Sciences at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and Dr Richard Layte, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, 2006).

Parents are 'cash rich and time poor' all round. David Coleman (Psychologist) stated on his RTE 1 television programme 5/3/07: 'It is best to give a child 10-15 minutes full quality time and have a meal together than no time at all'.

There is a shift in the balance of the family, and now families have to adapt to the changes in organisation as is explained by Daly (2004:2) as follows: 'As working



parents became the dominant practice in the 1990's, work/family balance issues became increasingly important'. As a result, the *family adaptation* model seems now to prevail. This is a model that is concerned with the manner in which both women and men navigate the pressures of paid and unpaid work and seek to find a fair distribution of effort (Barnett & Rivers, 1998). Because both parents work, they may be in a position to give their children treats that otherwise would not be financially attainable. Due to children spending time every day watching television and being influenced by advertising they are aware of new toys and game which are newly available.

Williams (2006) concurs with this evidence as was depicted in the television programmes on RTE 1 titled '*The Pope's Children*' – December 2006. It can be argued that children nowadays expect and demand everything in the 'here' and 'now'. This leads us into exploring if the effects of full day care are positive or negative for children.

#### **2.4.2 ARE THE EFFECTS OF FULL DAY CHILDCARE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE FOR CHILDREN?**

The researcher has learned that this topic is relatively unexplored in Ireland resulting in little literature or research available on it, and thus the researcher has relied on studies from the UK, Europe and internationally.

Purcell (2001) comments that in the UK there is concern for the welfare of children in the context of the long hours spent in non-parental care from a very young age. She notes that time spent with young children is valuable and if a parent continues to neglect such opportunities it is at the peril of damaging that relationship, and, thereby missing the opportunity to enter that rich world of intimacy (Purcell, 2001:163).

Furthermore, the following study links child obesity to working parents. In the UK the British Medical Association (2002) is backing the International Obesity Taskforce by trying to halt the obesity epidemic. A study was conducted by researchers at the Institute of Child Health in London who followed 13,000 children and found that offspring of mother who work long hours have less access to healthy foods and



physical activity and are more likely to be found in front of the television set (British Medical Association 2002).

In addition, Anderson, Butcher, & Levine, (2003:4) say that 'results from their study on *Maternal employment and over weight children* indicate that a child is more likely to be overweight if his/her mother worked more hours per week over the child's life. Analyses by subgroups show that it is higher socioeconomic status mothers whose work intensity is particularly deleterious for their children's overweight status'. Furthermore, Ruhm (2005:1) asserts: 'maternal labour supply reduces the time these children spend in enriching home environments. Some of the growth in obesity may be related to determinants of excess weight that are common to the child and mother'.

In addition, evidence suggests that there are differences in children's behaviour after spending long hours in childcare. The following studies, showing varying perspectives on the effects of full day care on children have been conducted mainly in the United States, Sweden and Canada.

Commenting on a paper: '*Childcare and its Impacts 0-2*', Belsky, Howes and Owens (2003) report that: 'Questions about the effects of non-maternal childcare have occupied the minds of both scientists and parents for the past 50 years and no clear answers have emerged, to date. Looking back on the early years of research, parents were provided with information that was based more on theories than on scientific facts. According to these theories, separating a young child from his or her mother was deemed to be detrimental before age 3'.

From another study, Belsky (2005) reports that: 'The majority of mothers in the U.S., who return to work after having a child do so before their child's first birthday'. These figures by Belsky indicate that 58% of all women with infants under 1 year of age are in the labour force; non-maternal care initiated in the first year of life has virtually become the norm for many children and their families. Placing children under two in an average non-maternal care facility for long hours does seem to be associated with some (modest) developmental risk, especially with respect to the mother-child relationship, problem behavior, and social competence and academic work habits, and such outcomes are not merely by-products of low-quality child care. Second, in

keeping with more than two decades of research, cognitive-linguistic development seems to be (somewhat) enhanced by high-quality childcare. But third, in no case are these child-care effects, or those pertaining to the type of care (i.e. centre care associated with greater cognitive-linguistic competence and more problem behavior), particularly sizeable in magnitude. Indeed, such effects are often dwarfed by the effects of family factors and processes (e.g. income, maternal sensitivity, maternal depression, paternal presence).

Moreover, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-blatchford & Taggart 2007: (23-60) in reporting on the Effective *Provision of Preschool education* (EPPE 'Promoting Equality in the Early Years: Report to The Equalities Review' noted that:

Good pre-school still matters. There is new evidence of continuing pre-school effects for attainment in Reading and especially in Mathematics as well as better social/behavioural development (increased Self-regulation and reduced Hyperactivity). It is differences in the quality and effectiveness of pre-schools that contribute to better outcomes in the longer term rather than just attending or not attending a pre-school setting (Sylva *et al*, 2007:61).

Furthermore, they noted:

Girls who had attended *high* quality pre-school have the best Self-regulation at age 10 of all groups. Girls who had not attended pre-school have poorer Self regulation at age 10 than girls who had attended pre-school. Self-regulation is generally better for children who had attended pre-school (apart from boys in low quality pre-schools). High quality pre-school appears to reduce Hyperactivity in boys; whereas low quality pre-school appears to increase Hyperactivity in girls. In addition, high quality pre-school provision, on the other hand, seems to help to close the gap for Self-regulation: FSM children who had attended medium or high quality pre-school do as well as non FSM children on Self-regulation at age 10. Poor quality pre-school appears to increase Hyperactivity and reduce Self regulation, again confirming the importance of quality especially for disadvantaged children (Sylva *et al*, 2007:59).

In addition, Howes *et al* (2008) report on their study of children in pre-Kindergarten programmes in the USA. They examined children's growth in school-related learning and social skills over the pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) year in state-funded programmes designed to prepare children for kindergarten. They expected that children's gains in academic and social skills could be attributed to variations in the structural and classroom process dimensions of programme quality. Nearly 3000 ( $n = 2800$ ) children were randomly selected, four per classroom, from approximately 700 randomly selected, state-funded pre-Kindergarten classrooms in eleven states. Enrollment in pre-K appeared related to gains in academic skills. Children showed larger gains in

academic outcomes when they experienced higher-quality instruction or closer teacher–child relationships. Gains were not related to characteristics of the child or programme (i.e., ratio, teacher qualifications and programme location and length). These findings have implications for a range of state and local policy and programme development efforts as well as for theories of contextual influences on development. They note that these results suggest that classrooms with better instructional support can contribute to children’s achievement, but that most current pre-K programmes fail to provide the kinds of instructional support that children need to be ready to learn.

A previous study by Palermo *et al* (2007) in USA confirmed similar findings that teacher training, education, and support for establishing close teacher–child relationships may maximize preschoolers’ academic readiness by promoting social adaptation.

In discussing the assessment of children's behavioural regulation Ponitz (2008) asserts that behavioural aspects of self-regulation, including controlling and directing actions, paying attention, and remembering instructions, are critical for successful functioning in preschool and elementary school. In recent years, several direct assessments of these skills have appeared, but few studies provide complete psychometric data and many are not easy to administer. They developed a direct measure of children's behavioural regulation, the *Head-to-Toes Task*. They examined construct validity, examiner reliability, sources of variation, and associations between task scores and background characteristics. Results showed that the task was valid, reliable, and demonstrated variability in children's scores. Results suggest that the *Head-to-Toes Task* is an informative and easy-to-administer direct assessment of children's behavioural regulation.

Moreover, Herry *et al* (2007) in Ontario, Canada explored the *Effects of a full-day preschool programme on 4-year-old children*. The study compared the development of a group of children who attended the preschool programme on a half-day basis during the 1999-2000 school year with the development of a group of children who attended the programme on a full-day basis during the 2000-2001 school year. The results highlight that the full-day preschool programme had a positive effect on the linguistic development of children. The full-day programme also had positive effects

on children's academic learning in terms of their awareness of writing, and functional aspects as well as mathematics. Teachers also noted that children who attended the full-day preschool programmes adjusted better and more quickly to academic life. However, teachers also reported that children who went to preschool on a full-day basis tended to be less attentive and more hyperactive in class. The teachers' evaluations did not reflect those made by the parents. The parents' evaluations suggest no differences between the behaviour of the two groups of children. The teachers did not observe any effect on children's pro-social behaviours stemming from the full-day preschool programme. However, they reported that these students had weaker overall social development as demonstrated by behaviours such as being less attentive to others and being less inclined to share. Parents generally had a positive view of the full-day preschool programme for 4-year-olds. They reported more satisfaction with the programmes than the parents of children attending the half-day programmes as well as greater progress in their children as compared to the beginning of the school year. A further study discussed the following:

In, *The effects of daycare: Persistent questions, elusive answers*, Shpancer, (2007) asserts that despite nearly half a century of research on the effects of daycare on children, the fundamental question of whether non-parental daycare adversely affects young children has not been answered conclusively. Daycare research has provided information, insights, and hints; but despite its lingering ambition, the daycare literature cannot settle the issue of whether daycare is good or bad for children; rather it trails, offering tentative and tempered admonitions, warnings, reassurances, and suggestions. Thus, the decision equation, even for the most informed consumers of the research, remains perpetually personal.

Evidence suggests that it is best to look at the research that has been already done in relation to childcare and education, for example, *The Effective Provision of Preschool education* (EPPE) (Sylva *et al* 2003) was a longitudinal study that investigated the effects of preschool education and care on children's development during the ages 3-7 years old. Currently, *The Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3-11* (EPPE 3-11, 2003 – 2008) project will continue to build on the extensive data collected in the original EPPE study, following the children up to the age of 11. The main findings of the EPPE study are that:

- Pre-school provision has positive effects on children's development
- Some pre-schools are more effective than others
- Beneficial effects of pre-school lasts through Key Stage 1
- An earlier start in pre-school is associated with better intellectual development
- Activities undertaken by parents and carers, such as reading to children, also make a difference to development
- Some features of pre-school practice (such as 'shared thinking') are particularly associated with effective outcomes.

In addition, the following US study shows the benefits of preschool care and education, titled '*Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40*'. It is the most well known of all High/Scope research efforts. It examines the lives of 123 African Americans born in poverty and at high risk of failing in school. From 1962–1967, at ages 3 and 4, the subjects were randomly divided into a programme group that received a high-quality preschool programme based on High/Scope's participatory learning approach and a comparison group who received no preschool program. In the study's most recent phase, 97% of the study participants still living were interviewed at age 40; Additional data was gathered from the subjects' school, Social services, and arrest records. The study found that adults at age 40 who had the preschool programs had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had committed fewer crimes, and were more likely to have graduated from highschool than adults who did not have preschool (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2008).

### **2.4.3 STUDIES EXAMINING VARIOUS TYPES OF CARE**

In 1991 a large-scale study examining the long-term effects of childcare on children was undertaken by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) in the US. The NICHD is the largest, most rigorous, ongoing investigation of the effects of childcare on children, available. The Study has followed 1,364 families since their infants' birth in 1991; the families have been studied at regular intervals. Data has been published at intervals, for example at the age of 4.5 and when children are 12 years old. Twenty-five of the United States' most recognised researchers are participating in this study – a very impressive team. On their website the NICHD shows several accounts of results from their numerous studies through the

Early Child Care Research Network. In 2001, the study's authors reported that children who went to day care were more disruptive both in kindergarten and Grade 3, but that those who attended high-quality facilities also scored better on tests of their memory and language skills. In 2007, they looked at how those same children were faring in Grade 6. Based on these latest results Belsky et al (2007) ask: *Are there long term effects of early childcare?* They comment on the most recent results from the NICHD study, released in spring 2007, which indicated that parenting was a stronger and more consistent predictor of children's development than early child-care experience, also higher quality care predicted higher vocabulary scores, however more exposure to centre care predicted more teacher-reported externalizing problems.

#### **2.4.4 EXPLORING MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT AND NON-PARENTAL CARE**

Other research projects have also involved significant numbers of subjects, for example, the following longitudinal study was conducted in Canada:

Nomaguchi (2006) examined the relationships between maternal employment, nonparental care, mother-child interactions, and preschoolers' outcomes. Data from the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (N = 1,248) show that maternal employment during the previous year, especially full-time employment, was related to care by non relatives, longer hours in school settings, fewer positive mother-child interactions, and less reading with parents at ages 2 and 4. Maternal employment was related to children's lower hyperactivity, more prosocial behaviour, and less anxiety at age 4, although little relationship was found at age 2. The results indicate that preschoolers may benefit from maternal employment, but benefits may be offset by long hours of non-parental care and fewer positive mother-child interactions.

#### **2.4.5 STUDIES IN RELATION TO STRESS HORMONES**

Research in relation to stress hormones was conducted at the University of Minnesota.



Watamura, Donzela, Alwin, & Gunnar (2003) conducted the following study: the study examined salivary cortisol, a stress sensitive hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) axis hormone in 20 infants (12 females; *M* age = 10.8 months) and 35 toddlers (20 females; *M* age = 29.7 months) in full day centre based childcare. Samples were taken at approximately 10.00 am and 4.00 pm at childcare and at home. At childcare, 35% of infants and 71% of toddlers showed a rise in cortisol across the day; at home, 71% of infants and 64% of toddlers showed decreases. Toddlers who played more with peers exhibited lower cortisol. Controlling age, teacher-reported social fearfulness predicted higher afternoon cortisol and larger cortisol increases across the day at childcare. This phenomenon may indicate context-specific activation of the HPA axis early in life. The implications for this study are that early exposure to stress may lead to subsequent health problems, as stress is the common thread in ill-health from high blood pressure to depression to peptic ulcers. This study by Watamura et al (2003) warrants further research.

The findings that cortisol increases over the day in full day out of home care has been replicated a number of times. It appears to be age related, with the largest increases observed among toddlers. It seems to bear some relation to children's social behaviour and temperament. Based on previous research, quality of childcare also seems to be involved in predicting whether and how much of a rise in cortisol is observed. However, at this point, the factors that influence these rising patterns still cannot be determined conclusively, nor do we have evidence that these increases in cortisol affect children's development. Nonetheless, because cortisol is a potent steroid hormone that is known to affect the central nervous system, evidence that this hormone is elevated over home base line levels for many young children in childcare warrants our attention (Watamura *et al* 2003: 1018).

In addition, Bee and Boyd (2007:397) ask what is it about non-parental care that predisposes infants to become aggressive, disobedient kindergartners. They note that studies of infants' responses to non-parental care may hold a clue and they explain this by relaying the above study by Watamura *et al*. Furthermore, they say that:

Some developmentalists argue that the higher levels of cortisol experienced by centre care infants affects their rapidly developing brains in ways that lead to



problem behaviours. However, they note that there is no direct evidence yet to support this hypothesis (Bee and Boyd, 2007:397).

Lamb and Abbott (2004), reports from the Berlin longitudinal study, in which they had been measuring the psycho-physiological, socio-emotional, and behavioural tendencies of infants in order to assess the effects of earlier individual differences in behavioural and psycho-physiological reactivity and infant-mother attachment on the adaptation to out-of-home centre care. During an adaptation phase, in which mothers remained in the centres with their toddlers, secure infants had markedly lower cortisol levels than insecure infants, suggesting that they gained more protective support from the presence of their mothers. When the mothers stopped remaining with their infants, the cortisol responses of the securely attached toddlers were much more dramatic than the responses of the insecurely attached toddlers: on the initial separation days, cortisol levels rose over the first 60 minutes after arrival to levels twice as high as at home. Secure toddlers also fussed or cried upon separation more than insecurely attached toddlers. Cortisol and behavioural markers of distress were correlated in securely attached but not in insecurely attached toddlers. The security of attachment changed in many cases following the onset of childcare, but attachments were more likely to become or remain secure when mothers remained longer in the child care facilities with their toddlers. Furthermore, also some babies and children can suffer from separation anxiety if put into childcare and especially if started there at a very young age.

This was endorsed by Buckley (2007) in comments made in her television programme, *'Baby on Board'*, she stated: 'Children who are put into crèches at too young an age can suffer from separation anxiety and stress'.

In studies examining *Prenatal/Perinatal Stress and Its Impact on Psychosocial Child Development*, Dipietro (2002) found that: 'The implications of maternal stress on the postnatal environment that is created for the infant may be of greater consequence than the biological effects of prenatal exposures. There is evidence that stress can be carried across the umbilical cord. Development problems in childhood may have their origins in stress-related birth outcomes (such as pre-term birth and foetal growth

restrictions) or may be a direct consequence of stress effects on developing foetal brain systems' (Dipietro 2002: 1-2).

The above studies are indicating that cortisol is an age related hormone in children and as has been described in the Watamura *et al* (2003) the quality of the childcare could affect the prediction of the rise in cortisol. If it is good quality childcare the levels are not as high because children are given attention and are consumed in the interesting activities and play that is being provided for them. The studies by Dipietro (2002) could indicate that child friendly work policies and longer maternity leave would be a good outcome for working mothers as this could alleviate stress caused to them in their working environment during pregnancy.

#### **2.4.6 STUDIES ON TIME SPENT IN NON-PARENTAL CARE**

Similar research about stress in children was found in the UK by Biddulph (2006), who said: 'Putting children under the age of three in nurseries risks damaging their development'. His view is based on growing evidence of increased aggression, antisocial behaviour and other problems among children who have spent a large part of their infancy being cared for away from home. He argues that such children may have problems developing close relationships later.

Research by Webster-Stratton (2005), showed: 'There are markedly fewer treatment studies conducted with preschool children diagnosed with ODD/CD than with school-aged children. The evaluations that have been conducted suggest that parental training is the single most effective treatment for reducing aggression in young children (ages 2 to 5)' (Webster-Stratton 2005: 3).

However, it is difficult for parents to do this training, given that most parents are now at work during those crucial years mentioned. Furthermore, as described below, when research findings on this and similar topics from the US were presented, it proved to be controversial.

Gilbert (2003) emphasises that: 'A report published in July 2003 from the Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, the largest long-term study of child care in

the United States, which was undertaken by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, a branch of the National Institutes of Health elaborates on findings of preliminary research that created a storm of debate when presented by the study's investigators at a child development meeting two years ago'. Up to this working parents had been leaving their very young children for long hours in full day care and they were surprised at these preliminary findings.

Further research such as the following asserts that children who spend long hours in childcare can show effects from it.

Sylva *et al* (2003:5) in reporting from findings by the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project showing that: 'high levels of 'group care' before the age of three (and particularly before the age of two) was associated with higher levels of anti-social behaviour at aged 3'.

Furthermore, Sylva *et al* (2005) reports from a study on 1200 children, which began in 1998. Researchers interviewed mothers when their babies were 3, 10, 18, 36 and 51 months old. They found that families use many different types and combinations of care at different stages in young children's lives. The study looked at the ways these different care experiences may be related to children's health and physical growth, social and emotional development, and intellectual development and learning. Among the first findings from the Families Children and Child Care (FCCC) study were that: children looked after by their mothers up to the age of 3 fare better in developmental tests than those cared for by nurseries, nannies, childminders or relatives. Nannies and childminders offer the best non-maternal care for children under 2, followed by grandparents, other relatives and finally nurseries – however the differences are slight.

The above evidence suggests that those who spend long hours in childcare may experience more stress and are at increased risk of becoming overly aggressive and developing other behaviour problems. But how can we define what constitutes a long day in a childcare facility?

Shellenbarger (2005) writes that Greenman (2005), senior vice president of 'Bright Horizons Family Solutions', an operator of high-quality child-care centres in Washington D.C. says: 'In some centers, six hours is a long day. The issue should be,

'What kind of life is the child leading?' 'How does the child's week fit together -- the people, the pace, and the expectations?' The answer will lie largely with both parents and well-trained, skilled staff.

### **Summary**

From the above paragraphs it can be noted that much research has been done to establish the effects of full day care on children and to show if long hours affects the child. However, there does not appear to be a definite answer as to whether it causes anti-social behaviour. Researchers seem to disagree even though the cortisol tests showed increased levels while children were in the childcare facilities in comparison to when they were in the home environment. Interestingly, parents and teachers reported better results when their children were moved from the half-day to the full day in the childcare facility. What this research is very clear about is that good quality childcare is very good for children and especially children from low socio-economic backgrounds, for example the High Scope project has proved this showing those who attended the programme were more likely to stay on in education, get employment and less likely to get in trouble with the law.

Parental programmes also contribute greatly to quality childcare. However, McCartney, Peisner-Feinberg, Ahnert and Lamb (2004), The NICHD and EPPE studies confirm that children who started earlier in childcare facilities had somewhat higher levels of anti-social or worried behaviour – an effect reduced but not eliminated by higher quality of childcare. Furthermore, Belsky (2005) asserted that placing children in an average non-maternal facility for long hours does seem to be associated with some (modest) developmental risk. Concurring with this evidence was the study in the US (2002) by Brooks-Gunn, Hann and Waldfoqel who found negative effects from mothers working 30 hours or more per week in the first 9 months after birth.

### **2.4.7 CHIDCARE FACILITIES V PRIVATE HOME CHILDMINDERS**

While there are studies to show that professional group care for children has its advantages there are advantages too for using private home childminders, for

example, children may be part of a smaller group in a home setting and parents may feel that they are receiving more care and attention.

A child minder cares for a small group of children of mixed ages in a “home from home” setting. Children are welcomed as individuals, they are offered affection and respect and their developmental and recreational needs are met. Child minders offer a flexible service, tailored to each child, thereby helping parents and guardians to balance their work and family commitments. A child minder negotiates and agrees her/his terms with parents (National Childcare Strategy).

It could be argued that the traditional structures of working lives denies those in work, and their children, the benefits of greater participation in childrearing. Young parents are more isolated from their extended families including grandparents because of high levels of mobility. It seems obvious that young families today require more supports due to the distances between family members, in order to fulfil the functions of the family. (David, 1994:182). This practical help to families would help to strengthen existing communities and develop new ones.

The government is enticing home childminders to register and in the last budget €15,000 was available as a tax incentive to would be childminders. However, only 4% of the country’s estimated 37,000 childminders are availing of tax breaks and are registered with the HSE to care for children (Health Service Executive website). It could be argued that some un-registered childminders are only doing this for the money.

However, child minding has always been popular in Ireland and especially in Dublin for example, Kelleher and Kelleher, 1994:15-22) did a survey *Home Based Child Minders: A Street By Street Study*, in child day-care in the Northern Partnership Area and found that: Informal child minding in the home was an important in the Partnership Area. In a street by street survey in Kilmore D where there was a relatively low proportion of children under the age of four, there were 54 child minder’s, representing 8% of households. Of these 54, ten were non-relatives and were undertaking child minding on a commercial basis. In Kilmore C where there was a high concentration of children under four years, there were 76 child minders,

representing 16% of householders. The vast majority of child minders were grandmothers. Making the assumption that the number of children was the key variable which determined the level of child minding, and applying these proportions to the Partnership Area as a whole, it was estimated that there was approximately 1,000 informal home based child minders in the Partnership Areas (Kelleher and Kelleher, 1994:15-22).

It can be argued that this pattern may return in Ireland now given that the economy is in decline, thus many parents will find it difficult to keep working but will have to continue doing so in order to pay the mortgage, thus the assistance of grandmothers may be sought to take care of the children. In Dublin and the larger cities, this may be easier to do but in rural areas it will be difficult and may result in one of the parents having to give up their job.

In addition, in 2003:30 the *Congress Report on Survey of Childcare Practices, Identifying Members' Childcare Needs* found that: Child minding in the home of a neighbour or childminder was the most significant type of childcare service used by respondents.

Furthermore, in 2000:17 the National Strategy Report of the Partnership Expert Working Group on Childcare found that: Childminding in the minders' home was the second most commonly used form of child care overall. It was used by 14% of mothers with youngest child aged 0-4 years and 35 of mothers with youngest child aged 5-9 years. Childminding in the minders' home was the most commonly used childcare arrangement among women with paid jobs.

However, in this survey there was only 6 childminders registered with the HSE. Owing to the difficulty in urban as well as rural areas to find childminders, 72.4% of working parents in this survey chose a childcare facility over childminders to care for their children. Childminders should be encouraged to register thus legitimising their businesses.

Purcell (2001: 120-122) comments that 'Due to the difficulty in locating minders the majority of parents choose communal minding situations, such as crèches. The



general government thrust is also to increase and improve crèche facilities, which in itself is a good thing. However, there are many advantages to the child being minded at home, in his own environment, by one adult, and it would be a pity if those advantages got submerged in discussions of training and improved facilities' (Purcell, 2001:122).

Childminding is the largest sub-sector within childcare in Ireland, and is generally undertaken by self-employed people in their own homes. Childminding is legislated for by the Childcare Act 1991, which is interpreted by the Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006. Over 73,000 families with pre-school children rely on childcare providers to enable them to work. It is estimated that up to 70% of children minded in this way are minded by a Childminder. The National Childcare Strategy estimated that there are 37,900 Childminders in Ireland (Childminding in Ireland, website).

Furthermore, for the term 2006-2009 Ireland has been elected President of the International Family Day Care Childminding Organisation (IFDCO). This is a major coup for childcare in Ireland, and particularly for childminding. This will culminate in a major International Conference in 2009 to be held in university College Cork. IFDCO, the International Family Day Care Organisation was formed in 1986 and is an international network of members involved in Family Day Care, what we in Ireland call Childminding. Members can share information, ideas and methods for the development of Childminding. Individual Childminders can become members of IFDCO. Childminders can network and professionalise at a local level by availing of supports available from their County Childcare Committee, at a local level by availing of supports available from their County Childcare Committee, at national level by being members of *Childminding Ireland*, and now at International level. IFDCO has 2,000 members from all over the world (IFDCO, website).

This conference will be coming at a good time because owing to the state of the economy many parents may be opting for childminders and the conference will promote and educate working parents about the options available to them.

Childminding Ireland has published its third annual survey report (March, 2008). In it they note that all 727 registered childminders took part in the survey. The response rate to the survey was 29.5%. The following are some statistic from the survey:



- 34% had been childminding for 3-4 years
- Also 34% have been childminding for longer than five years.
- 48% of respondents provided after-school care
- 52% of respondents provided care for a baby (under 15 months old)
- 92% of respondents minded children aged between 15 months and 6 years.
- 29% of Child minders had vacancies, and were looking for children to mind. Of those that had vacancies, 43% had been waiting longer than 6 months to fill the place.
- Child minders see “being valued by parents” as the most important issue for them as Child minders (80%).
- Training and ongoing professional development is also important to them (54%) (Child minding in Ireland, website).

In addition, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews TD, announced the official launch of the new Childminders Development Grant on the 5th June 2008 under the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010.

The new grant scheme contains a number of significant improvements, including a major increase in the maximum grant from €630 to €1,000 for Childminders. These improvements follow a review of the previous grant scheme under the EU co-funded Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP), which ran from 2004 until the end of December 2007. The Childminders Development Grant is designed to assist Childminders, already providing a Childminding Service in their own homes to enhance safety/quality in the service through the purchase of small capital items, equipment, toys and minor adaptation costs. It may also give financial assistance to new or prospective Childminders with their initial set up costs. The maximum grant available to a Childminder, who fully meets the criteria of the scheme, is 90% of total receipted eligible childcare expenditure, subject to a maximum grant of €1,000. The City and County Childcare Committees have been allocated €1.41 million for the Scheme (Sligo County Childcare Committee, website).

There is an extensive support for a National Network of Childminders in Ireland.

The National Childcare Strategy 2010-2016 has produced national guidelines for childminders. These Guidelines are intended to provide guidance for good practice to assist Childminders. They include:

- Nationally agreed Guidelines for good Childminding practice.
- Detailed information on Statutory Notification to the Health Service Executive (HSE) and Voluntary Notification
- Services provided to Childminders by the City/County Childcare Committees, the Child minder Advisory Officers and Childminding Ireland and
- Contact details of relevant organisations including addresses and phone numbers.

Networks provide opportunities for Childminders to come together to share their experiences learn from one another and offer mutual support. A Child minder can often feel isolated, as there are no 'co-workers' with whom to discuss and review the challenges and joys of caring for children. Networks facilitate the sharing of experiences as well as providing avenues for informal training and for advice and information from the ChildMinder Advisory Officers (CMAOs). They also provide opportunities for Childminders to identify any additional supports or formal training, they would like to see offered. Childminders can get further information on the network/s in their area, by contacting the local CMAO (National Childcare Strategy).

Networks are a good idea and nowadays with the easier availability of Internet access, it is good that networks are set up to assist childminders who may have been doing this work for many years but in isolation.

In Northern Ireland the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) states that:

- There are 3,600 registered childminders caring for 17,000 children in Northern Ireland every day
- Childminding is the most popular choice for working parents as it provides a uniquely flexible form of support to families and young children at an affordable cost.

- Childminding is the largest form of registered daycare and education provision for children aged 0-12 years, accounting for more than 35% of total childcare provision and over 60% of full day care (NICMA, website).

The following are the results of a recent survey (March, 2008) about childcare in Northern Ireland:

- 81% of respondents thought tackling shortage of childminders should be a priority for the Executive
- 30% of parents who had recently looked for childcare said they had found their search 'fairly' or 'very' difficult, with 17% describing it a 'very difficult'.
- Parents in rural areas were more likely to find their search difficult
- 52% of parents said the quality of care was an important consideration in seeking childcare, compared to 26% who thought cost was important and 27% who thought convenience mattered
- 52% of parents said it was important that childcare was provided by someone who knows the child
- 74% of parents said they'd prefer to find childcare through a work of mouth recommendation
- Just 1% of parents favoured finding childcare via the internet
- 45% of all respondents thought the quality of care offered by childminders was 'good' or 'very good', while 53% took a similar view of the quality of care provided by nurseries

The childcare survey was carried out by Ipsos MORI with a representative sample of 1,024 people in Northern Ireland (Belfast Telegraph).

However, there are dangers in every setting, including both group childcare facilities and private home childminders. Evidence from the *Matty Eappen Foundation* (2003) in the US showed that 'Shaken Baby Syndrome', had been the cause of death of baby Matty Eappen Caden. It is a decade since the case where Louise Woodward stood for trial for the murder of baby Matty Eappen. Woodward was acquitted; many believed at the time that the working parents should not have left their two young children in

the care of a young woman who was not well known to them (Matty Eappen Foundation website).

### **Summary**

Childminding has been in existence for many years in Ireland and is used more in Dublin and in the larger cities than in rural areas owing to not many childminders being registered with the HSE. Even though the government increased the tax break in the last budget, most childminders appear to be operating in the Black Market. However, childminders are providing a very good support service to working parents, offering care based on the role model of their own families. Parents need to be vigilant when employing a childminder to care for their children in their own home; the evidence of this was the tragic case of Matty Eappen. Also it is best to choose a childminder who is registered in Ireland with the HSE.

### **2.4.8 BEST PRACTICE IN CHILDCARE**

Modern societies – literate, technological, industrialised, urban, bureaucratic – ask a lot from both a child and its parents. While much emphasis is placed on quality in childcare, there appears to be little about whether parental care is better than non-parental care (White and Notkin-White, 1980:19).

While past research focused on the quality of day care, less concern was aired discussing if parental care is better than non-parental care. In countries, for example, Sweden and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) where social policies are well established they have made great progress in facilitating the provision of quality day care. This has led to more extensive development of day care services to encourage good practice (Melhuish and Moss, 1991: 190-213).

Research is needed and would be useful and welcome in Ireland about the relationships developed in childcare settings with the children and the caregivers. Lee (2006) reports on a qualitative study, in which the relationship development process of three infant-caregivers in a university-affiliated childcare setting was explored and

some contributing factors to the development were identified. Data was collected through multiple methods (observations, video recordings, interviews, documents) for a semester. The findings of this study reveal both common and unique patterns of relationship development. In general, it took about six to eleven weeks to build firm relationships in the supportive context. Yet, the time and opportunity that they had together, what they brought with them (e.g. personalities, relationship histories), and their match brought about differences. In addition, the infant – caregiver relationship was two-way and reciprocal, and the context had a significant impact on the development. This study supports the significance of the infant-caregiver relationship in high-quality infant educare (education) and caregiver education and sheds light on the necessity of a process-oriented and holistic perspective on infant-caregiver relationship development.

In addition, Hayes, O’Flaherty and Kernan (1997:114) suggests that in developing and improving early childhood care and education services in Ireland those concerned must:

- ✓ Recognise the varied provision that exists and develop mechanisms to bring the strands together rather than maintaining the artificial, structural divide between care and education that currently exists
- ✓ Take account of the need to upgrade early years teachers not only in terms of skill and competence but also in terms of morale and status
- ✓ Understand the way in which young children learn, valuing the importance of play, activity and social interaction n to their learning
- ✓ Always keep the child central to deliberations

It is through reflection that practitioners and parents can learn to adjust and change to better their practice.

Miller et al (2005: 9-20) explore the *Changing Times: Early Years Practitioners Today* by commenting on: how is professional work in the early years changing? Multi-agency working; professional responsibility and working with others; the role of the Senior Practitioner and your professional development. They note that change

is happening in this sector and that it will continue, and that there will be increasing movement and flexibility across job roles, settings and services. This will require new forms of training and qualifications, like the new Foundation Degrees, to bring together practice and more formal academic learning. Practitioners working with young children and their families will need to be trained to high professional standards: through training in the workplace or through routes leading to more formal qualifications (Miller et al, 2005:20).

Degrees in Early Childhood Studies are now offered in many educational settings in Ireland.

Moreover, Karoly *et al* (2005:135) assert that although an evidence base can always be strengthened by further research and evaluation of early childhood intervention programmes, findings nevertheless indicate that a sound body of knowledge exists to guide decision makers in making resource allocations. This research base helps to identify those children at greatest risk, the range of early intervention programmes that have high-quality evaluations, the demonstrated benefits associated with programmes that have been carefully studied, some of the key features associated with successful programmes, and the economic benefits that can flow from devoting resources to effective programmes. These proven results therefore signal the future promise of investing early in the lives of disadvantaged children.

In outlining, *Current theoretical perspectives: directions for the future?* Aubrey, David, Godfrey, and Thompson (2000: 207-9), assert that by relocating learning in school to learning in society we are more likely to achieve an inclusive view of learning and development which requires the consideration of learning in the context of home, community and schooling. This is already being addressed in early years research. While much remains to be learned about the activity of the young learner from birth to the development of competence in a range of domains, as well as the role that instruction plays in facilitating this process, early years education has a rich knowledge-base upon which to draw. Parents too need support with the learning and development of their children as described in the following study:

Evangelou and Sylva (2007) discusses the effects of two years of parental participation in *Peers Early Education Partnership* (PEEP) on children (at age 5). Gains were found in vocabulary, verbal comprehension, understanding about books and print, number concepts, and self-esteem related to both cognitive and physical competence. Thus, working directly through groups of parents was found to be an effective way of enhancing children's cognitive and social-emotional development. The main research question of this study was whether PEEP for 3-year-olds improved children's developmental outcomes. Using a quasi-experimental design, this evaluation has shown the significant impact of PEEP on children's literacy, numeracy, and self-esteem. The positive findings for PEEP help strengthen the case for interventions aimed at parents as educators of their children. This study has important implications for policy. It provides support, based on firm evidence, for funding of parental programs that, like PEEP, offer parents a curriculum to guide their support to children at home. Working directly with parents of 3- to 5-year-old children has been proved to be an effective way of improving children's cognitive development and self-esteem. The results demonstrate the important role that parents can play in their children's development and how they can be assisted in doing so.

Furthermore, Sylva and Taylor: (2006:165-177) asserts that there are several ways to define effectiveness, for example, practitioners can 'reflect' on their own experiences to try to come up with a set of practices they think will benefit children; to ask experts such as inspectors or advisers what they record (often on pro formas or rating scales) about the settings which they judge, as professionals, to be particularly effective and by thinking of effectiveness in terms of children's developmental outcomes, settings are effective if children thrive in them. Settings are considered as 'effective' if their children make developmental progress, much more than would be expected according to their family backgrounds of the neighbourhoods they live in. The Effective Provision for Pre-school Education (EPPE) research used an 'educational effectiveness' research design to pinpoint effective early childhood settings quality of the individual settings attended by children had a measurable impact on their tested progress up to age 7. Quality was described through observational ratings scales and through case studies. It was one of the vital ingredients that distinguished effective from ineffective setting and these matters for children (Sylva and Taylor: (2006:165-177).



Professionals have obligations when working with other adults as described by Lindon, (2006: 254-5). When families experience a supportive partnership, they may well ask for advice or guidance for further information. Part of continued professional development is to extend your knowledge but just as much your skills of how to find more information. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of boundaries to partnership. A valuable role in partnership can be to put families in contact with other professionals who could offer expertise – for instance, to disabled children and their families. However, whatever the pattern of involvement, it is important that talking with other professionals is never seen as more valuable than talking with children and their parents.

It is important for parents in Ireland to recognise that the child and their needs should be the number one priority. Where parents have to leave their child into a childcare facility or with a childminder, best practice should be adhered to at all times.

Whitbread (2003:15) writes of the importance of best practice within nursery and infant education by sharing the psychological approaches put forward by Piaget, Vygotsky, Brunner and Bowlby in learning to understand children's experiences. He emphasises the importance of starting with the children i.e. their needs and their potential when planning the implementation of an early years' curriculum. Some parents are aware of their children's needs. All childcare workers should be trained; vetted and qualified to work with children. The Irish Preschool Playgroups Association (IPPA) is committed to equality in all work and training. They provide courses for people working with children. Childcare workers should be qualified with (at least FETAC Level 5 qualification) which enables them to be aware of the needs of the children together with having an understanding of childhood development (IPPA website).

Also parenting and childcare courses need to be ongoing and available. These are very good for endorsing best practice by informing parents about new ideas and advocating for change. Parenting courses are available in Sligo, for example there is one running in St. Michael's Family Life Centre and *Lifestart* runs a parenting programme called the 'growing child' (Lifestart website).

Hayes (1993) published the first edition of the book *Early Childhood: An Introductory Text*. This was a landmark publication for students and childcare professionals. Since, it has gone through two further editions. It provided a backdrop for the growth of interest among those working in the field of child development in forming an influential group to act as a pressure for the development of early services (Hayes, 1993: 24). But whoever is caring for infants they need to have permanence, continuity, passion and a parent-like commitment that is difficult to find or meet outside the vested interests and social expectations of family roles and cannot be adequately replaced by professionalism (Leach, 1994: 83, cited in Henry, 1996:10).

Unfortunately, Leach recounts that some childcare professionals are only motivated by money, as discussed in next section.

Leach (1994) suggests, that professionals caring for very young children are solely motivated by money and says that few others will care for children 'as well as most parents because nobody will ever do as much for money alone as they will do for that atavistic mystery we call parental love'. (Leach, 1994: 84, cited in Henry, 1996:12). Many parents who leave their babies with professionals sense this, Leach believes, and thus, in addition to the stresses that accompany the role-swapping of mother for that of working-woman that: 'There is a broader, vaguer unease that many parents share but most rarely voice: a sense of loss, even foreboding, arising from leaving much of their children's socialisation, education and acculturation to paid labour and the values of the marketplace'. (Leach, 1994:22, cited in Henry, 1996:10).

Non-parental care is starting at a young age because in some cases babies are left into childcare facilities/childminder's homes as young as when they are only four months old.

Another issue is that, some children may be living in consistent poverty in Ireland.

Gibbons (2007:1) states that: 'there are a million plus children in Ireland and one in nine of these children spends their lives in consistent poverty; these are the children whose parents cannot afford to pay for necessary medicines, the children who cannot read or write after eight years of primary school education, the children in homes

without heating, cooking facilities or somewhere safe to play. Barnardos' Children's Budget is dedicated to each of these 110,000 children'. The government holds the power to make a difference for the 110,000 children who live in consistent poverty in Ireland. Children who are living in poverty are disadvantaged (Gibbons 2007).

In addition, Hayes (1995:1) notes that: 'a large proportion of children, mainly those living in poverty, are failing to gain from the educational system: they are leaving school early and are more likely to be unemployed as adults'.

The first years of a child's life are the most critical in terms of learning and development. While childhood is fleeting, it should be nurtured and protected by the law (Purcell, 2201:168). In Ireland, according to CSO tables (2006b), there are 120,050 three-to-four-year-olds and investment in this age group has been shown to be very worthwhile according to the Perry/High Scope Preschool as stated on page: 92 (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2008). Also aside from promoting their integral development, access to daycare centers and preschools for children from low-income families brings other social benefits. James Heckman, an American winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics (2000), having analyzed various international studies, concluded that early-childhood education and better quality services for children within the home ensure better lives for them as adults according to Heckman and Cunha (2005: 68).

Lee (1999:81), cited in Bohan and Kennedy (1999) also states that: 'With both parents in many cases working outside the home, the caring functions – whether for the elderly or for the children – has increasingly to be transferred to institutions'.

Because of the economic demands placed on parents, for example, both of them having to work in order to pay the mortgage, this leaves them with no choice but to leave their children into childcare. In many cases children are in full day care for up to eleven hours per day and until they are four years old and ready to start primary school. Furthermore, most children will return to the childcare facility/childminder's home for after school care. Could long hours in full day care be leading to children feeling lonely? 'Surprisingly, it has only been in recent years that research into children's loneliness has been undertaken with approximately 10% of children across

studies being found to report frequent loneliness' (Asher, Hymel and Renshaw, 1984 cited in de Róiste, 1998:60).

Furthermore, according to Bullock (1999:1) loneliness is a significant problem that can predispose young children to immediate and long-term negative consequences. It is becoming increasingly clear that many young children understand the concept of loneliness and report feeling lonely. For example, kindergarten and first-grade children responded appropriately to a series of questions regarding what loneliness is ("being sad and alone"), where it comes from ("nobody to play with"), and what one might do to overcome feelings of loneliness ("find a friend") (Cassidy and Asher, 1992). In a more recent study (Ladd, Kochenderfer, and Coleman, 1996), kindergarten children's loneliness in school was reliably measured with a series of questions such as, "Are you lonely in school?" "Is school a lonely place for you?" and "Are you sad and alone in school?" These studies suggest that young children's concepts of loneliness have meaning to them and are similar to those shared by older children and adults. Children who feel lonely often experience poor peer relationships and therefore express more loneliness than peers with friends. The issues of loneliness were once considered relevant only to adolescents and adults. Research suggests that this notion is misguided and that a small but significant portion of young children do in fact experience feelings of loneliness (Asher, Parkhurst, Hymel, and Williams, 1990). As a result, the immediate and long-term negative consequences associated with loneliness in children are becoming apparent, and the need to observe children and to develop and implement intervention strategies is becoming critical. When teachers take time to focus on individual needs of children, build relationships, and assist them with their needs, children thrive (Kontos and Wilcox-Herzog, 1997) (Bullock, 1999:1).

Furthermore, Asher and Paquette (1984:1) assert that although loneliness is a normative experience, there is reason to be concerned about children who are chronically lonely in school. Research indicates that children have a fundamental understanding of what it means to be lonely, and that loneliness can be reliably measured in children.

Keeping channels of communication open is very important.

Hayes, O' Flaherty, and Kernan (1993:197) asserts that; 'we communicate through gesture, movement, spoken and written word; throughout the early years - as language both spoken and written begins to emerge as the predominant form of communication – other non-verbal forms of communication are still used and of critical importance; our world is full of symbols and the opportunity to experience and draw on experiences is important for children.'

Evidence suggests that with the growth of parental emancipation, childcare and early education, anxious questions are increasingly asked. Parents of very young children ask: 'am I doing the right thing with childcare?' Parents of slightly older children ask: 'when are they going to start teaching my child to read?' Professionals ask 'why can't parents understand what we're doing for their children?' Community members ask: 'Is it any wonder those young people are out of hand when they've been deprived of maternal attachment'? (Henry, 1996:11). Parental Coaching is on the increase also. Parentline run by volunteers is in existence for over twenty years offering confidential help to stressed parents via telephone or face to face to parents (Parentline website).

Parents are spending very little quality time with their child who is in full day care, for example, it could be six o'clock in the evening when they collect the child at the childminder/childcare facility, then get home and have dinner and it is time to put the child to bed. Here, we have learned about the ill effects of not spending long enough with your child.

Studies from the US have alerted us to the benefits of spending more time with your child.

In research by Waldfogel (2005) in the US, it was found that:

Parental leave is associated with better maternal and child health

- Lower maternal depression.

Lower infant mortality; extending leave 10 weeks reduces post-neonatal mortality 4%, child mortality 3%



- Fewer low birth-weight babies
- More breast-feeding, it was found that children whose mothers return to work within the first 3 months after birth receive less health care and are less likely to be breast-feed
- More use of preventive health care.

This research has been corroborated by Kamerman (2005) writing about Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave Policies in *'The Potential Impacts on children and their families'*, she states that: 'While research into the consequences of leave on children is comparatively limited, the positive consequences of leave on the health of mothers and children have been documented in several countries. Increasingly, child well-being is being discussed as an important component of policy and warrants further attention by researchers' (Kamerman, 2005:2).

A study by Ruhm (1998:23) found that: 'Paid parental leave policies improved child health as measured by birth weight and infant or child mortality and parental leave has favourable and possibly cost-effective impacts on paediatric health - leave provides parents with additional time to invest in taking care of their young children.'

### **Summary**

Where social policies are established, there are good early childcare services promoting best practice, for example in Germany and in Sweden. Best practice in childcare can be achieved by parents, teachers, and childcare practitioners using an holistic approach to guide and support the child through early childhood care and education. With the further development of childcare degree courses, this will advance childcare to a more professional level.

It is clear from this research that society is changing. Care is being experienced outside the home because of necessity on parents to go to work. Penelope Leach would say that nobody can care for a child like a parent. However, parents are relying on professionals to provide the care. Unfortunately some children who are poor may not benefit from childcare and thus will be losing out, as education is the key to progression out of the poverty trap. As yet it is not clear if children who have spent

years in childcare settings suffering from loneliness. This is closely linked with the topic of attachment, already discussed in section 2.3 above.

This research has demonstrated that our lines of communication have changed from a situation where the mother was always at home and open to conversation to the present situation where non-parental care is the norm. This has changed the course for communication and one wonders if there is adequate time now for communicating. Furthermore, could this be a contributing factor for the large amount of suicides in Ireland (approx 500) per year. Furthermore, family friendly work policies are needed for parents, which would help women who wished to breastfeed for longer periods.

#### **2.4.9 ARE CHILDREN MISSING OUT WHEN PARENTS WORK FULLTIME: CHILDREN'S VIEWS**

In New Zealand, *News View* (Aug. 15, 2006) a magazine, asked working parents: are our kids missing out? Here are some comments from those who answered YES: 'There's no doubt in my mind that kids are missing out and babies if they are placed in childcare. I would not even consider it for my two children and no we are not rich, we are struggling to make ends meet but we know that this is the best way for us to provide our children with the best start in life we can, providing them with a nurturing, loving, safe environment, that could not possibly be comparative to them being placed in day care. There will be plenty of time later on for my career and our material wants, now is the time for our family, our children'.

Furthermore, Garbarino and Garbarino (1984:318) state: 'When the world of work forces an adult, male or female, to choose between being a good parent and a good worker, children suffer and ultimately, the future is impoverished.'

In addition to this, Ruhm (2002:3) when discussing the effects of *Parental Employment and Parental Leave on Child Health and Development* found that: 'Parental presence during the early years constitutes a significant investment in child development. Recent research has begun to clarify the role that parents play with particular emphasis on the importance of their presence during infancy'. This view is supported by Neidell (2000: 26) who asserts that 'positive effects are found for



mothers investing one year of uninterrupted time, which corresponds with a major developmental milestone for an infant: the maturation of the orbit frontal cortex.'

It is research like this that has led to increases in the weeks that mothers can take for maternity benefit in Ireland and it is envisaged that in the future parental leave will come available too. In addition, Engle (2002) states: 'Policies are also needed that provide women protection against returning to work too soon after giving birth. Maternity protection legislation is woefully inadequate. Whereas 192 countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, only 38 have ratified the International Labour Organization's 1952 Maternity Protection Convention. Even if signed, the latter's provisions apply to only a small proportion of the population'.

Moore, Sixsmith, and Knowles (1996) reports on a survey conducted in the UK. In the survey: '*Children's Reflections on family life.*' the children who were interviewed did not feel they were different because both their parents were employed outside the home and had demanding careers. This was taken for granted as the norm and when pressed, they saw some problems that this could bring, but they were all much more aware of the advantages, and they did not prefer one parent to be at home full time.

However, in the US women have been in the workforce for many years now, but what did their children think about being left in childcare while their mothers were working? This is explained by the following study conducted in the USA with 30 Chicana and Mexican immigrant working women who demonstrate their feeling towards working women.

Segura (1997:269-272, cited in Richardson *et al*) suggests that:

The Chicanas all resembled each other in that the women who had been raised by employed mothers recognised that their mothers worked out of economic necessity but they felt that they did not receive sufficient love and care from their mothers. Throughout the interviews the women expressed hostility and resentment to their employed mothers for leaving them with other caretakers. These feelings contribute to their decision to stay at home with their child and/or their sense of "guilt" when they are employed.

In comparing these two studies, it could be argued that it can be assumed that as yet the children in the UK study are too young to understand and have become accustomed to their parents going to work as is the case now in Ireland where children are accustomed to being left into childcare facilities from when they were as young as

four months old as is the evidence from this study. However, the women in the Segura study are older and have had time to reflect. Their reflection has left them in no doubt but to stay at home with their children because they have intense feelings resulting from their mothers leaving them and going to work when they were children. However, as in this study the economy has determined that parents go to work.

Unfortunately some employers in the UK as well as Ireland may require some parents to work very long hours. This can be especially difficult for women. Harman (undated) in the UK did a survey on the views and experiences of working mothers in six textile and manufacturing factories. The two principal findings why women returned early to work while their child was still a baby, were lack of money, and job insecurity. Of course working parents in Ireland have the choice to work part-time but in this study, the working parents said they could not afford to work part-time.

If this is the case then the children in the family will need to be told by the parents about the family situation and the need to spend long hours at work. Older children need to know the family situation and they need to feel happy and secure in their home.

It is important for children to feel secure in their home life. We now need to know more about how children perceive the stress caused by job insecurity for many parents. Parents who are both in demanding careers requiring long hours have been describes as 'work rich' by (Brannen *et al* 1994, cited in Moore *et al* 1996) Others are 'work poor' with both parents unemployed or underemployed. We also need to know more about how children experience family life in families where economic hardship may be exacerbated by parental employment frustrations.

A study by Ermisch and Francesconi (2003) suggests that the short-term effects of early maternal employment lead to slower emotional development and weaker cognitive outcomes, measured when children are between 4 and 12. In the longer term it manifests in lower educational attainments for children in their late teens and twenties. There is also evidence of worse performance by children in their late teens and twenties in the labour market, higher unemployment and a greater risk of early child bearing.

A study published in *PUB Med* (National Library of Medicine and National Institute of Health), University of Wisconsin by Vandell and Ramman (1992) looking at the effects of early and recent employment on children from low-income families, they found that: 'The effects of early maternal employment (employment during the child's first 3 years) and recent maternal employment (employment during the previous 3 years) on 189 second-grade children from low-income families found that maternal employment was related to a number of selection factors. In comparison to mothers who were not employed, employed mothers scored higher on a mental aptitude test and were more highly educated. Both early and recent maternal employment was also associated with measures of the current family functioning: there was less poverty and higher home environment scores when mothers were employed'.

These results are discussed in terms of possible mechanisms by which maternal employment may affect children's development. Another study by Hill et al (2005) looking at maternal employment and child development gives the following results: 'The authors compared outcomes across 4 maternal employment patterns: no work in first 3 years post birth, work only after 1st year, part-time work in 1st year, and full-time work in 1st year: The results demonstrate small but significant negative effects of maternal employment on children's cognitive outcomes for full-time employment in the 1st year post birth as compared with employment postponed until after the 1st year'.

The evidence indicates that women will be enticed into returning to the workforce and according to the National Skills strategy report (2007); a million more workers are needed to keep the Irish economy competitive

But, even where both parents work in the family, they still find it difficult to maintain a standard of living and it is women who are not getting an equal pay or equal benefits due to for example, leaving work and going on maternity leave.

O'Connor (2007) recalls that at the SIPTU National Forum, Esther Lynch, Legislation and Social Affairs Officer with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions called on women to begin a campaign to tackle "*the child bar*". Lynch stated: "The "*child bar*" needs to be tackled with the same anger as we attacked the marriage bar. In doing this, mandatory paid paternity leave for fathers should be considered, as well as legislating

for a right to flexible work arrangements.’ It can be argued that equality for women is still a myth in Ireland. A question that raises considerable debate is why some parents leave their children into childcare facilities or with childminders who in some cases are not qualified and who are paid low wages to care for their children, while they choose to work in conditions often fraught with inequality’.

Furthermore, at the National Women’s Council Of Ireland (NWC) launched Election 2007 Manifesto ahead of International Women's Day, McMinn (2007) said: ‘Women were still discriminated against in every sector of society, for example, out of 30,000 apprentices, only 131 are female, also inequalities continue to be exacerbated in retirement because women have lower pensions as a result of unemployment, work time and parental leave.’

Glenn *et al* (1994:214) asserts: ‘employers may be reluctant to “invest” in or train women workers who, they perceive, may leave a job at any time for familial reasons. Because employers view women as mothers (or future mothers), they encounter discrimination in job entry and advancement.

Furthermore, CSO figures for 2007 show that average weekly income for females compared with males are 72% in manufacturing industries and 75% for clerical employees in the construction industry (CSO 2006a Earnings).

In addition, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006) reports that in Ireland there was a 13% pay gap in women’s hourly wages, in Denmark it was 10.1% and in Slovenia 6.9%.

It can be argued that conditions have not changed much for the women of Ireland since 1982 as depicted by Farmer, a US writer, who asserted: ‘It does appear however that, despite increasing opportunities for economic independence in many countries, there remains a distinctive women’s ‘cause’ with separate and identifiable interests regardless of political structures which, of whatever political complexion, have seemed unable up to now to incorporate into their programmes the justice women see’.



Following Farmer's 1982 quote, the question remains, what changes have really happened for justice for working women/parents in 2007?

In the USA, Hewlett (2002) in her book: *'Creating a life: professional women and the quest for children'*, tackles one of the most wrenching challenges for women today — creating rich multidimensional lives that contain both career and children. She discusses that almost half of all professional women are childless at age 40. The more a woman succeeds in her career, the less likely it is that she will have a partner or a baby. For men the opposite is true: the more successful a man is professionally, the more likely it is that he will be married with children. By and large professional women have not chosen to be childless. For example, 42% of women in corporate America are childless at age 40 (compared to 25% of men), but only 14% planned to be. Hewlett's exhaustive research reveals a host of circumstances that have conspired to constrain women in the development of their professional careers, for example, America's long-hours corporate culture, a stubbornly traditional division of labour at home, and a fertility industry that lulls women into a false sense that they can get pregnant deep into middle age.

Crittenden, (2007:1) in her study: *'Being a mother in academe: challenges, possibilities and changes'*, looks at recent studies of college educated women and she says: *'Can women really have it all? What is new however, and what has captured the interest of the media and general public, is that the women now under discussion are women who should, by virtue of their privileged status as the first generation of college-educated baby boomer women, be able to "have it all"'*. However, recent studies demonstrate, however, that professional women have been largely unsuccessful in their attempts to wed motherhood with a career. A study cited by Crittenden shows that fewer than 20% of college-educated baby boomer women have managed to achieve both motherhood and a career to be successful in achieving a career as the women with children.

In Ireland, the report from *Babies and Bosses – Reconciling Work and Family Life* (OECD, 2003:18) notes the "vicious circle" women workers can find themselves in:

Since female workers have limited incentives to pursue a career if they perceive the likelihood of advancement is more limited than for men, they are indeed more likely to withdraw from the labour force, only to return, if at all, in jobs that are often low in job content compared to their potential. As a result, employers do not use labour

resources efficiently, and ... do themselves a great disservice by shutting out mothers and women more generally, many of whom have high levels of educational attainment.

It can be argued that fathers should be more involved in child rearing. Fine-Davis *et al* (2004), quotes McKeown *et al*, 1998 who notes that an Irish review of research on fathering in an international context concluded that the more extensive involvement fathers have with their children, the better it is for them in terms of cognitive development and performance at school as well as in terms of critical personal traits

It would benefit women/mothers/partners too if men were more involved in the childcare and housework when both parents work. The following US study conducted by the National Sleep Foundation (2007) details an investigation into insomnia and found that (70%) of women had sleep problems in comparison to only (53%) men. Insomnia affected every aspect of the women's lives. They were struggling to cope with work, childcare and housework.

In Crittenden's other book named *The Price of Motherhood* (2001:1), she writes: 'The most important job, even economists agree, is raising the next generation. Like other social issues, it's difficult to refute that claim, but so hard for many to put into practice'.

In addition to this, the Office of the Ombudsman for children (OCO) (2007) conducted a survey called *The Big Ballot* by asking children and young people across Ireland up to 18 to tell them about the issues that were important to them. The OCO will commit to working on these ISSUES over the next few years. The OCO identified a number of issues through academic research and then asked the 150 young people for their views on them. The results of the national *Big Ballot* were announced on Tuesday, November 20th at Dublin City Hall. Nationally, the issue which children have identified as being of most concern is Family and Care, followed by Play and Recreation. The most important issue for children was family and care at 31.5%.

The percentage results of each of the five issues voted on by children and young people are as follows:

1. Family and Care 31.5%
2. Play and Recreation 24%
3. Having a Voice 16.5%
4. Health, Wealth and Material Wellbeing 16%
5. Education 12% (Office of the Ombudsman for children, 2007).

### **Summary**

In studies looking at children's views there was mixed reactions about their parents at going to work. In most cases it was the norm and they were accustomed to it. However, in the US Segura (1997:269-272, cited in Richardson *et al*) study, all the Chicana women had been raised by employed mothers and they resented it. In Ireland women were enticed into the workforce because of the booming economy.

Moreover, the studies show that there is still inequality towards women at work because they work in the services in low paid jobs, they get low wages, they have little chance of promotion and there is hardly any consideration for family circumstances. Furthermore, there appears to be little value placed on mothering in society.

### **2.4.10 CONCLUSION**

The researcher can confirm from this literature review that in the past five to ten years, there have been major changes in society in Ireland resulting in disparities in the quality of life. The Celtic Tiger boom of the late 90's onwards has had lasting effects. No other developed country is experiencing such rapid change. In the past 20 years, the population rose from over 3 million to 4.34 million at present (CSO 2007a Population and Migration Estimates April 2007).

Between now and 2020 it is forecast to rise by another million. Employment is at an all time high, so much so that the government has to rely on between 100,000 and 150,000 thousand immigrants to fill posts over the next five years. Non-nationals filled three-quarters of the jobs created in 2005.



The most remarkable change has been the amount of women in the workforce. While only a quarter of women over the age of 35 hold third level qualifications the figure is much greater for younger women thus enabling them to be competitive in the labour force. There are few marriages, divorce is on the increase and co-habiting is the norm. Women are waiting until they have their career established before embarking on childrearing. Thus many women are in their late 20's, early 30's before the first child is born. While maternity benefit has been extended in the last budget to 26 weeks (March 2007) paid leave with an additional 12 weeks unpaid leave afterwards, many women realise that they cannot afford to stay at home this long. Some women are returning to work once the baby is four months old. In many cases it will depend on where she is employed.

Therefore, childcare is a big issue for working parents. The government has increased funding and by 2010 it intends to have provided 50,000 extra childcare places. There are many community childcare facility premises proposed. Parents have to make decisions about the type of childcare that best suits their needs. In some cases choice is not an option. All this puts parents under immense stress and pressure, trying to combine a full time job, childcare and running a home. House prices have increased drastically over the past few years and both parents have to work in order to pay the mortgage. Some parents are relocating to hinterland towns or moving to the west of Ireland in order to have some quality for their families.

There has been an increase in the provision and quality of childcare provided by childcare providers. As discussed on page 36, the government has introduced the new multi-annual Investment Programme with the aim of funding 50,000 additional childcare places by 2010. Childcare workers are fully qualified and trained and there are ongoing childcare courses aiding the continued provision of good quality childcare.

From research compiled under the heading 'are the effects of childcare positive or negative for children', the researcher has discovered that while there is little written research so far on this topic in Ireland, (necessitating the use of some media rather than journal or book references) there is research from the UK, Europe and the US.

Most studies stress that good quality childcare is a must and it has beneficial long lasting effects. However, if the quality is not good the children and parents will lose out. Some studies have shown that children who spend full days in childcare may be aggressive as measured by raised levels of cortisol, a hormone associated with stress. Furthermore there is evidence that children are missing out when both parents are employed and in some cases maternal employment has negative effects on children, especially children from low-income backgrounds. The research indicates that ideally children should be over one year old on entering childcare.

In summary, this literature has proved that the provision of full day care has improved the quality of life children and their parents. If a working mother wants to return to work either part-time or fulltime after her child is one year old she knows that in most places but (depending on where she lives) there will be a choice of good quality childcare facilities available that she can choose for her child. Good quality childcare provision has improved immensely in Ireland owing to the amount of research conducted by CECDE and others, coupled by the inputs from the government through funding. However, the government could do more for working parents, for example, allow maternity leave with full pay for one year as well as increasing paternal leave.

After exploring the four themes in this literature review, the researcher goes on to do the field work in Sligo and Letterkenny by arranging interviews with the managers of private and community childcare facilities as well as childminders in their own home. Furthermore, she discusses and explains about the compilation and distribution of questionnaires to working parents in Letterkenny and in and around the Sligo town area. The researcher will collate information by making comparisons and conclusions from the research in this literature review with the data acquired from her primary data analyses.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 INTRODUCTION.

In this chapter the methods chosen by the researcher will be detailed. This will involve an examination of research design, pilot study, location, sampling procedure, ethical considerations, data collection including research diary, timeframe, process and analysis and finally limitations including issues that emerged during the research. To access an optimum overview, 'methodological triangulation' was adopted (Edwards and Talbot 1999:55), encompassing primary quantitative and qualitative methodologies and secondary research consisting of a literature review. Triangulation is a three-point perspective and is used by the researcher to gather a set of data that respect the multiple perspectives, which are usually found within and around cases.

Quantitative primary research was used for the questionnaires. Quantitative research methodology is theoretically located in a Positivist philosophy. Positivism is the oldest theory in the social sciences. It is linked to the work of Comte (1798-1857) and Durkheim (1858-1917).

Quantitative methodology is based on the '*The Positivist Philosophy*' which is defined as a means to understand the world based on science (Macdonis and Plummer, 1997:16). The logical form of this methodology is deductive i.e. a theory driven approach, emphasising measurement i.e. statistics, quantifications and behaviourism which can be measured and quantified. Facts should be kept apart from values and objectivity is vital (Edwards, and. Talbot. 1999:6).

Qualitative primary research using semi-structured interviews was employed. The researcher conducted all the interviews; this enhanced the consistency of the study.

Qualitative research methods are those, which attempt to pick up and convey the ways that the participants in the events under scrutiny make sense of them. They include some forms of observation methods and interviews. It is subjective and inductive as it

looks at ideas and attitudes and it can be interpreted differently by people (Edwards and Talbot, 1999:186).

This type of research is based on Interpretivism and relates to the work of Weber (1864-1920) and his emphasis on '*The empathic understanding of human behaviour*'; it is based on Interpretative Philosophy (Macionis and Plummer, 1997:87).

Secondary research consisted of the extensive literature review. The researcher collated information both from a national and international perspective in all aspects of the study. The researcher discovered that in Ireland very little to date has been written in books or reports pertaining to this topic. Therefore, the researcher used current up to date newspaper, radio, and TV and Internet sources. A wide variety of material was available on the Internet from an international perspective.

Information was coalesced on the four themes in the literature review:

- Quality of Life
  - What are the tangible changes on the quality of lives for families when parents of young children are in the labour force, thus requiring provision of full day care for young children?
- Quality Provision
  - What are the tangible measures taken in Ireland in relation to quality provision in early childhood care and education?
- Attachment
  - What can be observed with regard to attachment for children when they are in childcare because their parents are in the workforce?
- Childcare Issues
  - In relation to the provision of full day care for young children, what is viewed as best practice by researchers, parents and childcare managers?

## **3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.1.1 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH – QUESTIONNAIRES FOR WORKING PARENTS**

While the questionnaires were given to working parents in and around Sligo town and to the managers of the childcare facilities were living in and around Sligo town (apart from two in Letterkenny) the researcher can not assume that the children in the childcare facilities were all belonging to the working parents who took part in the questionnaire survey.

Primary research in the form of questionnaires was chosen for the study because:

- ✓ They provide a lot of information fairly speedily
- ✓ Identify some relationships between the data
- ✓ Ensure confidentiality and anonymity of respondents when data are reported
- ✓ Reliability is high, e.g. questionnaires can be used with different groups and over time
- ✓ Speed of analysis (can be coded and edited quickly)
- ✓ The researcher retains 'control' over the research process
- ✓ It is a valuable descriptive and exploratory design (Edwards, and. Talbot, 1999: 41).

The questionnaire was distributed to working parents of children who were cared for in childcare facilities. Initially, a draft questionnaire was drawn up for this purpose.

The researcher distributed 1,010 questionnaires, 325 were returned from 85.5% (n=278) females and from 14.95% (n=47) males.

### **3.1.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH – INTERVIEWS OF CHILDCARE MANAGERS**

Semi-structured interviews provide much more scope for the discussion and recording of respondents' opinions and views (Moore, 1997: 29).

The researcher chose interviews in order to attain a good rich data because of their advantages:

- You get 100% response rate to your question
- You can probe and explore meanings and interpretations held by participants
- You hear the language and concerns of the participants
- Participants usually enjoy them

They yield the good rich data essential to, for example, case study (Edwards and Talbot, 1999:101). It was decided that the managers of the childcare facilities should be interviewed.

### **3.2 PILOT STUDY**

A pilot study is a miniature version of a study, which tests the procedure prior to the actual study, checking if instructions are clear, whether the task can be performed given time constraints or any other demands and whether one has developed a workable, sensitive and reliable scoring procedure (Heiman, 2001).

Pilot studies are a sure way to clarify validity and reliability issues in the study; the researcher found them to be a yardstick for the study proper.

The questions used in the questionnaires and in the interviews were based on data uncovered in the literature review under the four themes.

#### **3.2.1 PILOT STUDY – QUESTIONNAIRES**

Using the draft questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with 25 people. It was noted that some questions were too narrow; some did not give enough space if the interviewee wanted to elaborate on an answer. The questions relating to money had

been omitted by the researcher but proved to be a topical point with the participants in this pilot study. Some questions needed alterations with regard to construction and phrasing of sentences. After amendments to the pilot questionnaire, the researcher progressed to the final version (Appendix: 2) for delivery to the working parents.

### **3.2.2 PILOT STUDY – INTERVIEWS**

Initially, a draft questionnaire was designed for the pilot interviewees; 5 participants took part in the pilot study. Different issues arose and were highlighted. It became clear that some questions were overlapping; others were too narrow; some could have been phrased better and some pivotal questions were unknowingly being omitted. After re-wording and re-structuring, the final questionnaire was adapted and used for the semi-structured interviews (Appendix: 3). Its aim was to garner information pertaining to the themes of the study.

The first two interviewees stressed that they would not like to have their interviews recorded by tape-recorder. From then on, it was decided to conduct the interviews using the pre-typed sheets of questions in the form of a questionnaire. As questions were answered, the interviewee wrote down the answers. At the close of interview, if an interviewee wished to add further comments, these were written at the bottom of the questionnaire. Each day after interviewing, the researcher wrote up extensive notes relating to each interview.

## **3.3 STUDY LOCATION**

### **3.3.1. STUDY LOCATION – QUESTIONNAIRES**

Questionnaires were distributed to working parents in Sligo town and surrounding areas and the parents of children who attended both childcare facilities in Letterkenny, Co Donegal. Boxes of questionnaires containing a front-page cover note (Appendix: 4) explaining about the survey were personally delivered to all work places participating in the research by the researcher. Sealed boxes to ensure anonymity and confidentiality were distributed with the questionnaires, to be used for the posting and safe keeping and accumulation of completed questionnaires in the respective study



locations. At the end of the questionnaire field work, the researcher collected all sealed boxes and excess non-used questionnaires.

### **3.3.2 STUDY LOCATION – INTERVIEWS**

Interviews were conducted with childcare managers in and around Sligo town and County and with two managers of childcare facilities in Letterkenny, Co Donegal, in each of their premises by prior arrangements, or by phone.

## **3.4 SAMPLING FRAME**

### **3.4.1 SAMPLING FRAME – QUESTIONNAIRES**

For the questionnaires, the sampling frame consisted of 5 workplaces and 14 childcare facilities, including the 2 childcare facilities in Letterkenny.

### **3.4.2 SAMPLING FRAME – INTERVIEWS**

The sampling frame i.e. list of population from which a sample is drawn (Greenfield, 1996: 139). The researcher contacted the Sligo County Childcare Committee and was given a list of registered childcare providers in and around Sligo town.

## **3.5 SAMPLING SELECTION**

### **3.5.1 SAMPLE SELECTION – QUESTIONNAIRES**

Again, in order to attain a full representative sample, it was decided to target parents who worked in public and private sectors in Sligo town, hence, questionnaires were distributed to office staff at the Institute of Technology, Sligo; Abbott Ireland employees in both the Ballytivnan and Finisklin plants in Sligo town; to employees in the Department of social welfare, at Cleveragh Road, Cranmore, Sligo and to staff at Sligo General Hospital, the Mall, Sligo. Also the managers of 16 childcare facilities

agreed to give the questionnaires to the parents of children that they were caring for in their childcare facilities.

### **3.5.2 SAMPLE SELECTION – INTERVIEWS**

The researcher aimed to have a true representative sample from the childcare providers; therefore, 15 private childcare facility managers in Sligo and also two private childcare facilities managers in Letterkenny, County Donegal were interviewed. Six home childminders were interviewed and four Community based childcare providers, all in Sligo. At the time the fieldwork was taking place these were all the childcare facilities in and around Sligo who were listed and registered as providing full day childcare services.

### **3.6 ETHICS**

Ethics were strictly observed as follows:

In conjunction with the ethics committee in the Institute of Technology Sligo, the researcher adhered to the following:

#### **3.6.1 BENEFICENCE**

The anonymity and privacy of participants was respected at all times as appropriate measures were taken to store research data in a secure manner. Once questionnaires were completed, all participants were asked to place scripts in the sealed voting type boxes. Once data analysis had been completed on the questionnaires they were stored in a locked cabinet at the Institute of Technology, Sligo. Only the researcher has a key to this cabinet. Previous to the questionnaires being given out to working parents, they were informed about the day the study would be starting by the researcher distributing flyers in their places of employment. In addition to this there was a cover sheet on the front of the questionnaires, which outlined the details about anonymity and confidentiality. The same procedure applied to the interviews.

The extensive notes from the interviews were typed up, printed, filed and stored with back-up copies on computer. Before each interview commenced each participant was informed that no identifying information was required and that information acquired from each respective respondent was completely confidential and could not be traced back to that particular respondent.

Research professionalism was also maintained in relation to integrity of individual viewpoints, respect for human rights and diversity at all times. The rights and welfare of the participants were also of paramount importance where for example, all participants had the right to withdraw from an interview or from completing questionnaires at any time (Pintilat, 2005).

### **3.6.2 NON-MALEFICENCE**

Sensitivity to research participants was ensured and no harm came to any participants who decided to take part in this research (Pintilat, 2005).

### **3.6.3 RESPECT FOR AUTONOMY**

Informed consent was an explicit part of this research process where all participants were informed about the nature of the study and its affiliations (Sociological Association of Ireland website).

### **3.6.4 JUSTICE**

There was no discrimination in terms of who was interviewed or who was given the questionnaires (Sociological Association of Ireland website).

### **3.7. DATA COLLECTION**

#### **3.7.1 RESEARCH DIARY**

From the start of the study, since September 2006, the researcher has kept a research diary, which she used every day to enter and record correspondence, dates, time, and all information pertaining to the study.

#### **3.7.2 PROCESS – QUESTIONNAIRES**

The researcher wrote a letter of request to the Personnel managers (Appendix: 6) of the five workplaces asking them would they be so kind as to partake in the research. This was followed up by a phone call. All 5 workplaces plus 16 childcare facilities agreed to take part. When the researcher was conducting the interviews with the managers of the childcare facilities, she showed them a draft of the questionnaire for the working parents and asked them if they would be so kind as to ask the working parents to please take part in the research by filling out the questionnaires. To facilitate this, the researcher designed and printed Posters/flyers (Appendix: 7) to be used by the childcare managers/work personnel managers in their places of work alerting the working parents to the upcoming survey and asking them if they would be so kind as to consider taking part in the research. As with the personnel managers, all childcare providers co-operated by asking the parents to fill out the questionnaires. The researcher placed voting-like sealed boxes in each workplace for the completed questionnaires. Follow up phone calls by the researcher established the collection dates for the completed questionnaires/boxes.

**Table 3.1 Timeframe for Data Collection - Questionnaires**

<b>Time - Questionnaires</b>	
Started Fieldwork	9 <sup>th</sup> of January 2007
Finished Fieldwork	30 <sup>th</sup> March 2007

One thousand and ten (1,010) questionnaires were distributed and 325 questionnaires were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 33.8%.

The researcher sent thank-you letters (Appendix: 8a) to the personnel managers who took part in the research by distributing the questionnaires in their place of work. She

asked them to put the letter up in the canteens of their workplaces. Also she sent thank-you posters to the childcare/personnel managers (Appendix: 8b) and also asked them to display them in their childcare facilities so that the parents who took the questionnaires would know they were appreciated and thanked for taking part in the survey.

### **3.7.3 PROCESS - INTERVIEWS**

Like the questionnaires the researcher wrote a letter of request to all the childcare managers whose names and addressees appeared on the list from the Sligo County Childcare Committee (Appendix: 5). The two facilities in Letterkenny were contacted also. In the letter, the researcher outlined the study and asked if the managers would kindly take part in it. Ninety nine percent (99%) of those contacted took part. In total, 27 interviews were conducted. The letter was followed by a phone call in which arrangements about the interviews were made, for example, to conduct the interviews at times that were convenient to both the interviewee and the researcher. All interviews took place in the childcare facilities apart from four telephone interviews with home childcare providers who were unable to be interviewed until night time when the children had gone home. All interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour depending on the relevance of the depth of information coinciding with themes in the study.

**Table 3.2 Timeframe for Data Collection - Interviews**

<b>Time - Interviews</b>	
Started Fieldwork	14 <sup>th</sup> of December 2006
Finished Fieldwork	19 <sup>th</sup> February 2007

Apart from the 27 childcare managers who were interviewed, the researcher also interviewed 3 politicians from across the political divide in Ireland and she also interviewed the chairperson of the Sligo County Childcare Committee. This data was not seen as very useful in hindsight and therefore was not used in the present study.

### **3.8 DATA ANALYSIS**

Once all the boxes of questionnaires were collected the researcher started to code the data and enter it into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 15.0 for windows). The researcher had included a space at the end of the questionnaires where she asked parents to include any comments that they wished to make. The researcher studied the comments and entered some of them in the discussion on the questionnaire in chapter five.

In addition, on completion of all the interviews the researcher set about coding and cleaning the data while analysing and interpreting it. Similarly, quotations given by interviewees were noted and some were included in the discussion on interviews in chapter five. 'Qualitative research maintains that we explore, catch glimpses, illuminate and then try to interpret bits of reality. Interpretation is as far as we can go', (Holliday, 2002:5). The information was organised under the themes. The author paid attention to running trends throughout the interviews; these were checked against the theory, "a theory is a proposition about the relationship between things" (Denscombe, 2003:300). In turn emerging trends were examined in relation to the literature reviewed. Like the questionnaires the analysis of the results was performed using SPSS, which incorporates both inferential and descriptive statistics. Once data was inputted, it was cleaned and prepared for preliminary analysis.

### **3.9 LIMITATIONS**

The researcher found that there was little peer reviewed information on this topic in Ireland and very little written in books/journal in the UK.

#### **3.9.1 ISSUES THAT EMERGED DURING THE RESEARCH**

Moreover, she found that time constraints played a major part in parents partaking in the study. Working parents appear to have little time for completing questionnaires. The researcher spent 6 days, 5 hours per day over 3 weeks, in the staff canteen at Sligo General Hospital, encouraging people to take part in the research survey.

In addition to this, childcare managers (even though an appointment had been previously made with them) also appeared to be under huge time constraints at the times of the interviews. In all the work places, the researcher made several phone calls and extended the date deadlines for the collection of the questionnaires in order to achieve a better response. However, after many attempts to try to get more parents to complete the questionnaires, it was decided to accept what was left in the sealed boxes in each work place.

### **3.10 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the researcher has outlined the journey she took in undertaking the project and the various processes, which led to fulfilling its aims. The research has been inspirational for the researcher in her gaining a clearer understanding of the various issues and elements which both co-incide with and heighten the effects of full day care on children in Ireland today and which has a major effect on their quality of life and that of their families.

It has also been successful in providing insights by means of analysis of the data uncovered from the themes in the literature review. By using qualitative methodology in semi-structured open ended interviews with childcare managers and quantitative methodology employing questionnaires with working parents, the researcher acquired first hand knowledge of the situation on the ground in Sligo in the areas of quality of life in Ireland today for children and their parents as well as the effects of long-term childcare on children. It could be argued that the findings could be taken to represent the situation in the West of Ireland or indeed in Ireland as a whole.

Incidentally, the findings indicate that much progress has been made with childcare in Ireland and it continues to improve. However, still a lot of work has to be done in order to recognise the needs of working parents who operate as dual earner families owing to the determination of enormous pressures placed on them by economic changes in society in Ireland.

An in-depth presentation of results is presented in Chapter Four.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PART ONE - RESULTS FROM QUESTIONNAIRES**

#### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

For the purposes of clarity I will be only examining the most prominent questions which will give the most information on the themes that I have selected to look at, for example, the effects of quality of life issues for parents and their families; and the effects of full day care on children.

Questionnaires were given to working parents who worked in public and private workplaces in and around Sligo town; also the childcare managers who were caring for the children took some questionnaires and distributed them to the parents of the children that they were caring for. The researcher distributed 1,110 questionnaires and received back 325. The questionnaires when analysed yielded interesting results as will be discussed.

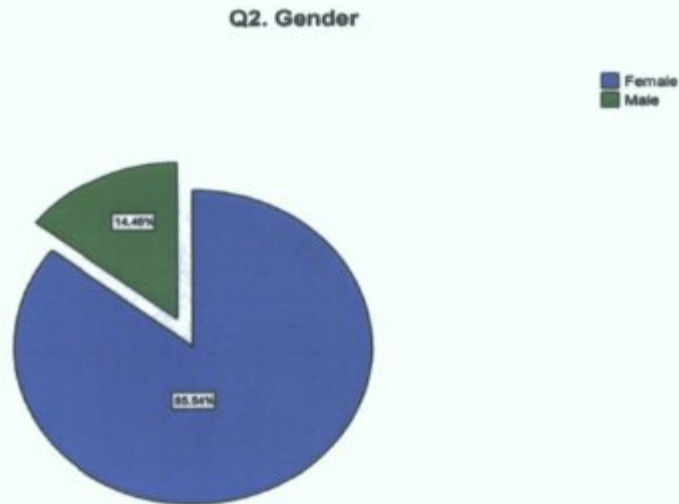
#### **4.1 PROFILE OF PARENTS**

##### **4.1.1 AGE**

The largest group of parents who responded are those between 25 and 35 years of age (52.6%) and those who are more than 35 (41.5%) constitute the majority of the remainder. Only a small percentage of the group are below 25 (5.8%). When we collapse these figures further, we can see that almost two thirds of respondents are young parents i.e. 58.4% are 35 years or younger.

## **4.1.2 GENDER**

**Figure 4.1 Gender**



In this study 85.5% (n=278) were females, as opposed to 14.95% (n=47) males.

## **4.1.3 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

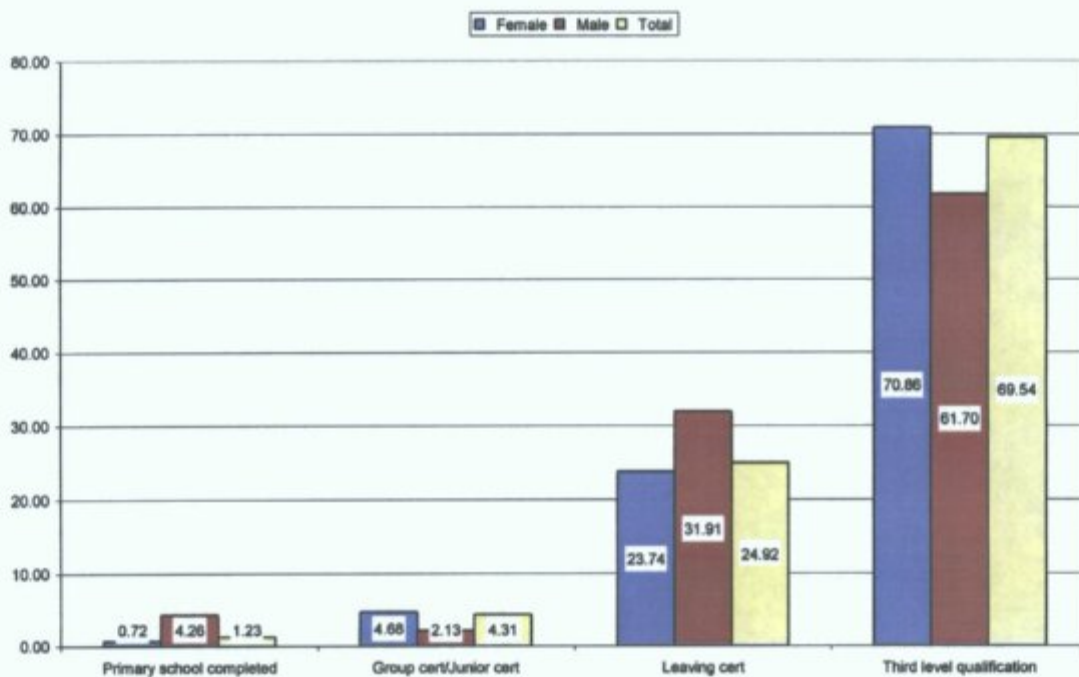
In examining the situation regarding educational attainment we see that more males (31.91%) than females (23.74%) completed their leaving certificate. However, slightly more females went on to third level education. Given that 85.5% of respondents in this survey were female and only 14.95% were male we can see that there is just a slight difference between females and males who have attained a third level education, for example, 70.86% females had attained a third level education as against 61.70% of males.

**Table 4.1 Educational Attainments**

**Q3. Educational Attainments**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Primary school completed	4	1.2	1.2	1.2
Group cert/Junior cert	14	4.3	4.3	5.5
Leaving cert	81	24.9	24.9	30.5
Third level qualification	226	69.5	69.5	100.0
Total	325	100.0	100.0	

**Figure 4.2 Gender & Educational Attainments**

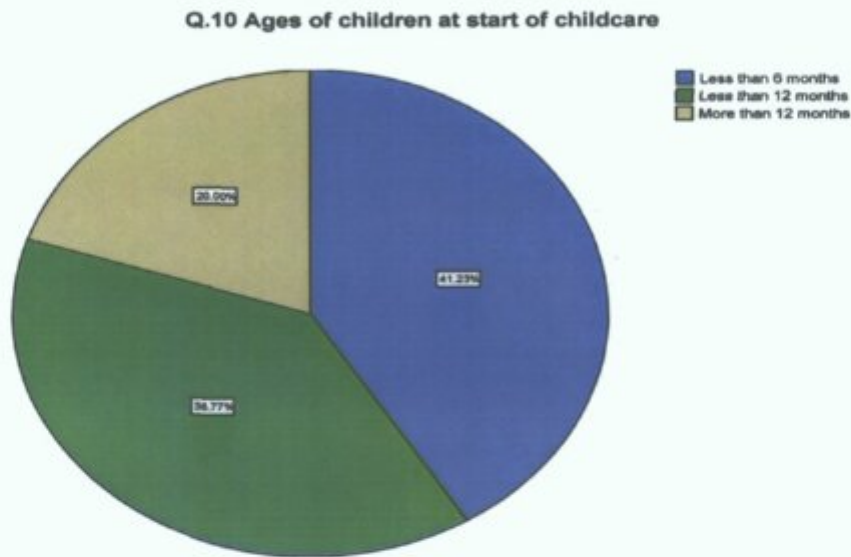


**4.2 CHILDREN & CHILDCARE**

Results show that from the 325 respondents, who answered the questions in the questionnaire about their children, there had been 519 children in total, ranging in age from 0-6months to 6 years of age. Almost half i.e. 48% (n=158) had 1 child and (43%) (n=142) had 2 children. A third i.e. 33.5% (n=108) of respondents had a child aged 2 while 28.3% (n=92) had a child aged 1 year old. The other respondents had children aged 3, 4 and 5 while 14.83% (n=78) had a child aged 6. Respondents reported sending 41.2% (n=134) of their children into childcare when they were less than 6 months old. A further, 38.77% (n=119) of children were less than 12 months old when they started childcare. Figures show that 20.00% (n=72) of children were

over 12 months old when they started childcare. Given that this was a relatively small sample i.e. 325 working parents, the figure of 41.2% (n=134) for children being left into childcare at under 6 months old is quite high as will be explored in the discussion later.

**Figure 4.3 Ages Of children At Start Of Childcare**

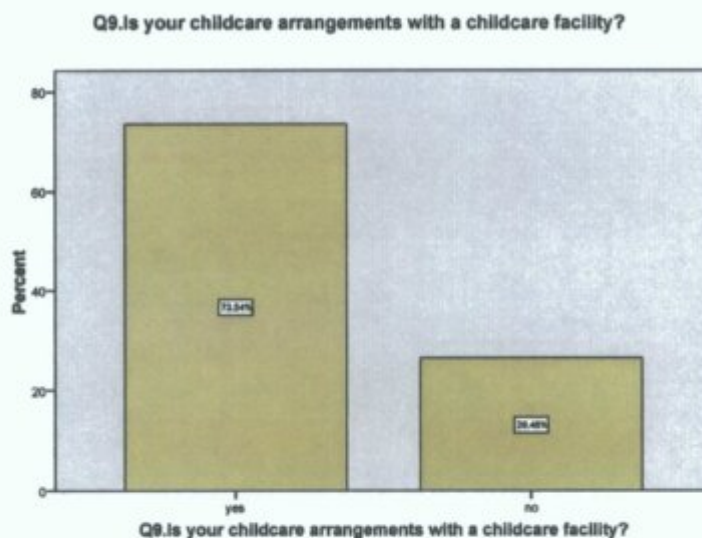


#### **4.2.1 CHOICE OF CHILDCARE FACILITY**

We can see that over two thirds 74.2% (n=241) of respondents choose a childcare facility to care for their children instead of using a family/friend or home childminder. It was important for respondents that the staff were fully trained and qualified and this was reflected because 69.8% (n=168) chose this preference. The next important factor for families was that they felt group care was better for their child/children and 66.8% (n=161) of respondents chose this option. A third option chosen by 44.8% (n=156) respondents was that they wanted their child to be open to a wide range of learning facilities. Finally 46% (n=111) preferred that their child/children should be in an environment such as a childcare facility where there are lots of other children.



**Figure 4.4 Most Parents Choosing A Childcare Facility To Care For Their Children.**



In comparison, only 25.8% (n=84) chose a family member/friend to care for their child/children. The first reason given for choosing a family member/friend was that most of these at 82.1% (n=69) felt their child/children was getting better care and attention by being with a family member/friend as opposed to a stranger caring for their child. Another reason for choosing a family member/friend was that 70.2% (n=59) felt their child/children were familiar with this person. Being happy to leave their child/children with this person was another factor and 63.1% (n=72) voiced this opinion. Accessibility came into play too with 48.9% (n=41) saying that the family member/friend's home was on their way to work and this was a deciding factor for choosing this type of childcare for their child/children.

Respondents were asked about the time that they take their children to the crèche and how long the children spend in care:

#### **4.2.2 TIME THAT CHILDREN OF RESPONDENTS SPENT IN CHILDCARE**

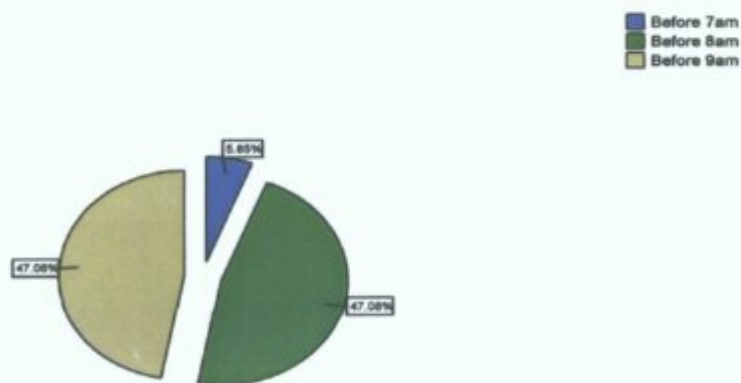
In the questionnaire, parents were not asked directly how long daily their child spent in childcare. Similarly, there was no question as to how many worked part time. However, with respect to the time that children of respondents spent in childcare it was apparent that an equal amount, i.e. nearly half at 47.1% (n=153) of working

parents leave their homes at 8 am and 9am respectively. Out of the 325 respondents over half at 53.8% (n= 175) of respondents arrived home from work with their child after 5 pm, while 46.92% (n=150) arrived home after 6pm every day. We can assume from this data that some of those parents who leave both before 8am and before 9am do not get home until after 6pm. The data from this survey shows that a high figure of 90.5% (n= 294) of respondents said that their child was in care for more than 3.5 hours per day. Here we can see that some of these children would be in care from 8am until after 6pm every day.

In addition, almost four fifths at 79.4% (n=258) said that their child would remain in care for more than 3 years. More than half at 59.1% (n=192) said that their child would return to the childcare facility for after school care. It appears from these figures that almost four fifths of the children at 79.4% (n=258) are in care from once they are 6 months old until they are over 3 years old and may still be in care until they are 12 years old seeing as 59.1% (n=192) will go to after school care in the childcare facility.

**Figure 4.5 Times Parents Arrive At Childcare Facility With Their Children.**

**Q.11. What time do you leave your house with your child?**



### **4.3 WORK.**

The researcher discovered that 57.5% (n=187) of respondents have been at work for more than 10 years. This correlates with the largest group of working parents who responded to the survey who are those between 25 and 35 years of age (52.6%), and who would now have been in work for 10 years or more.

**Table 4.2 Years That Respondents Have Been Working.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 15 years	82	25.2	25.2	25.2
	More than 10 years	187	57.5	57.5	82.8
	Less than 5 years	36	11.1	11.1	93.8
	Less than 3 years	20	6.2	6.2	100.0
	Total	325	100.0	100.0	

Furthermore, over two thirds i.e. 80.6% (n=262) of those respondents reported that they were in dual earner families. When asked if their place of work offered child friendly facilities 44.9% (n=146) said that child friendly arrangements were offered to them. In addition, just over half at 53.2% (n=173) said that flexi-time was offered to them and 65.2% (n=212) said part time work was offered to them. Furthermore, 41.8% (n=136) of respondents said that their employers offered them career breaks however, 80.9% (n=263) of them said that they could not afford to take a career break.

#### **4.3.1 ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES OF WORKING.**

Of those questioned about the advantages of working, over two thirds or 72.6% (n=236) said they work to pay the mortgage. Fifty seven per cent (n=188) said they want to have their own money rather than being dependent on partner/spouse or state.

On moving on to the disadvantages of working respondents were clear about the disadvantages of working by outlining the following issues: A large amount of respondents at 78.5% (n=255) said that they are missing out on their children growing up. Added to this was the fact that 77.5% (n=252) said that they don't spend long enough with their child/children, while 57.5% (n=187) said that they are gone from



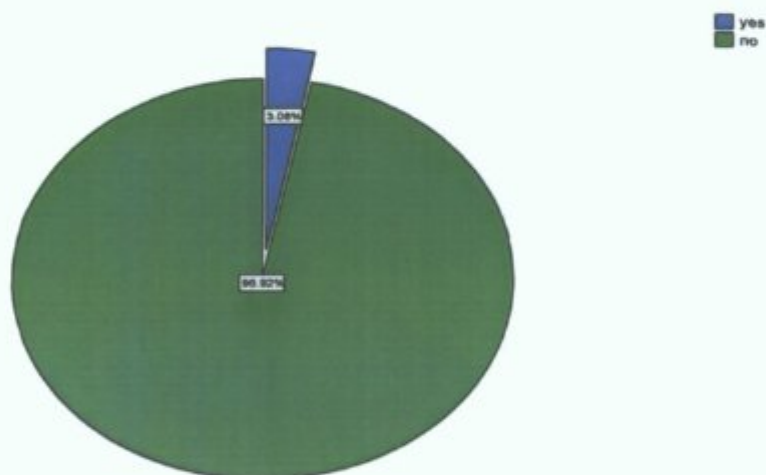
their home and their children/family for the full day. Compounding these three issues 68% (n=221) said that economics have determined that they go to work.

#### **4.4 GOVERNMENT AND WORKING PARENTS**

When respondents were asked if they thought that the government was doing enough for working parents, almost all 96.9% (n=315) overwhelmingly said no and when asked about the changes that they would recommend from the government for working parents they gave the following replies.

**Figure 4.6 Government Not Doing Enough For Working Parents.**

Q32. Is the government doing enough to help working parents?



The majority of respondents at 86.8% (n=283) said there should be a system of tax credits on childcare costs for working parents allowing them to work less and spend more time with their child/children. Coupled with this 62.2 % (n=202) said the government should subsidise childcare costs and cap private childcare fees, while just over half at 52.6% (n=171) said to increase maternity and paternity leave until the baby is 1 year old and to introduce more parental leave to help working parents.

#### **4.5 QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES**

Considering the length of time potentially spent in childcare, it is important for the parents to be satisfied with the quality of care provided. Overall, when asked if they were satisfied with the level of childcare provided for their child/children, 58% (n = 189) of respondents said that they were very satisfied.

When respondents were asked how they would measure quality of life for their child, their family and themselves they gave the following responses:

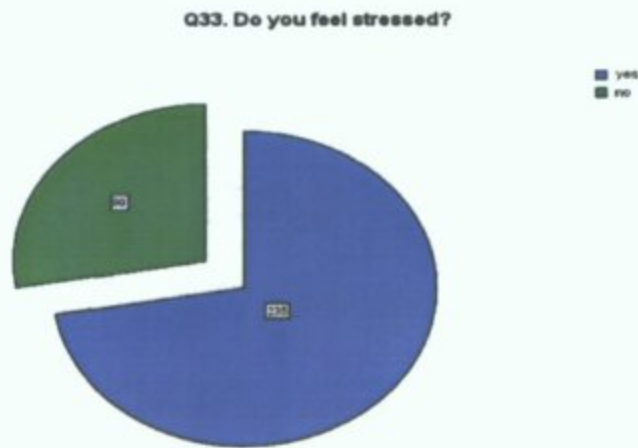
Nearly all at 98% (n=321) said having a healthy child was a primary factor when deciding quality of life issues; almost all at 98.5% (n=320) said that their family being healthy was the most important issue while almost all at 99.1% (n=322) agreed that being healthy themselves was the most important measure of quality of life. Over two thirds of respondents at 70.5% (n=229) said it was important that their child has a good circle of friends. Another important quality of life issue cited by 57.5% (n=187) of respondents was meeting their own friends. This was followed by 56% (n=184) of respondents who regarded having their own money as important with regards to their quality of life. A further important issue mentioned was that 53.8% of respondents (n=75) said having dinner together at weekends was important for them and their families, while 52% (n=169) of respondents felt that taking part in their children's activities was an important quality of life issue. Furthermore, 37.8% (n=123) of respondents cited a good primary education as being an important factor in the quality of life for their child. Finally, when asked if they were happy overall with their quality of life, 74.2% (n=241) of respondents answered yes to this question.

## 4.6 STRESS

**Table 4.3 Stress**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	235	72.3	72.3	72.3
	No	90	27.7	27.7	100.0
	Total	325	100.0	100.0	

**Figure 4.7 Stress**



In the survey, respondents were asked if they felt they were stressed. Over two-thirds at 72.3% (n=235) answered yes to this question. The main reason given by respondents 57.25 (n=186) for being stressed was because they were not spending enough time with their children/families. The second reason given for stress was time management with 49.6% (n= 161) of respondents being affected by it. In third place was financial worries with 46.5% (n=151) of respondents being stressed by this. Finally, 34.1% (n=111) respondents felt stressed when off work owing to their child/children being sick.

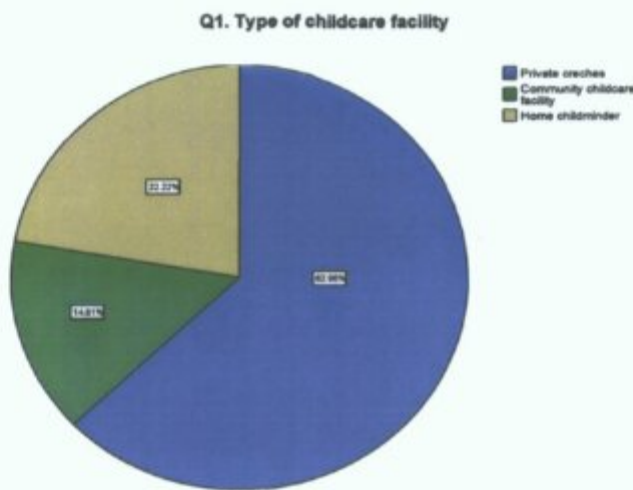
## CHAPTER FOUR

### PART TWO - RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS

#### 4.7 TYPE OF CHILDCARE FACILITY

In this survey there were 3 types of childcare facilities in which there were 17 private childcare facilities; 4 community childcare facilities and 6 home child care providers in their own home. In total, there were 27 childcare facilities.

**Figure 4.8 Types Of Childcare Facilities**



At the time of fieldwork on interviews with childcare managers, there were 935 children in childcare across the 3 types of childcare facilities. One childcare facility in Sligo town cared for 90 children per day while one facility in Letterkenny cared for 80 per day. The total figure (935) represents the amount of children in this small sample of 27 childcare providers, which is quite a large number in non-parental care if one considers that this could be extrapolated from the northwest to the rest of the country.

#### 4.8 SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CHILDCARE FACILITY.

An important factor for working parents when choosing a childcare facility for their child/children was the services provided by the childcare facility. In this survey, all 27 childcare providers offered extra services, for example:

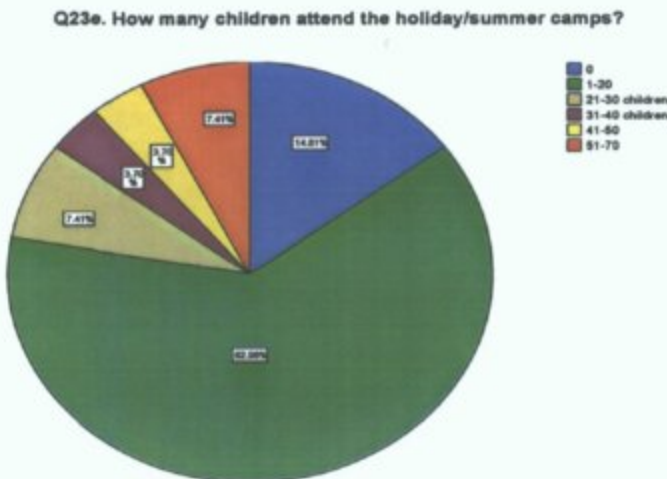
- Dropping off and collecting from primary schools



- Breakfast
- Hot meals (dinner)
- After School care
- Summer/holiday care

The statistics show that 85 children were dropped off and collected from primary schools; 257 children had breakfast - in one facility where 16 children were cared for, the interviewee said, *All babies and children arrive in pyjamas, we have to change the nappies (sometimes dirty) and dress and feed the children.* In addition, 23 out of 27 childcare providers provided a hot meal for the children, and 623 children received hot meals; 253 children attended after school in the childcare facility where they were being cared for. This figure coincides with figures from the questionnaire survey showing 59.1% (n=192) of respondents saying their child would return to the childcare facility for after school care. Also 79.4% (n=258) of respondents said their child would remain in care for more than 3 years. Summer/holiday care was provided by 23 childcare facilities and 535 children availed of it.

**Figure 4.9 Children Attending Summer/Holiday Care**



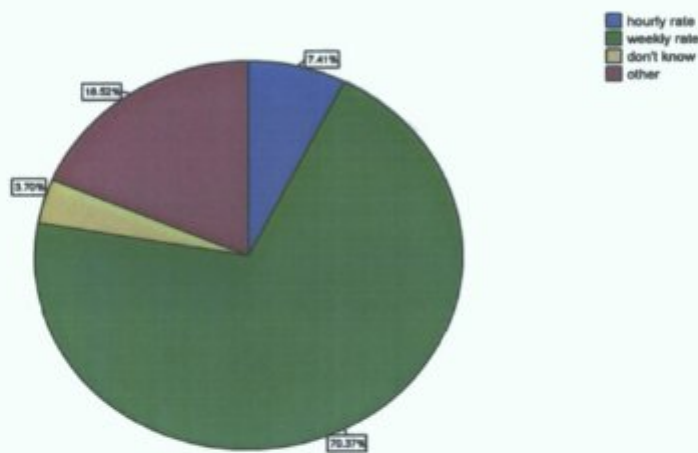
**4.9 COSTS, QUALIFICATIONS, TRAINING/EXPERIENCE IN CHILDCARE**

The researcher found that the cost of childcare was a major issue for working parents. From the research (December 2006 - May 2007) it is evident that costs vary but mostly it was between €120 and €157 per week for one child. Babies were more

expensive to care for with costs ranging from €130-€150 per week for one baby. Most childcare providers were charging €5 or more per hour. More than half i.e. of the childcare providers (70.4%, n= 19) said they charge a weekly rate; 81.5% (n=22) of crèches included a hot meal (dinner) for the price; 51.9% (n=14) charged €121-€150 per week.

**Figure 4.10 Costs: Hourly/Weekly Rate**

Q13. How much does it cost, is it an hourly rate or a weekly fee for childcare?



**Table 4.4 Staff Statistics**

Q15. How many staff are working here in your facility?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1-5 staff	15	55.6	55.6	55.6
6-10 staff	6	22.2	22.2	77.8
More than 10	4	14.8	14.8	92.6
10-20	2	7.4	7.4	100.0
Total	27	100.0	100.0	

Furthermore, the researcher asked about staff levels and was told that more than half of the childcare facilities i.e. 55.6% (n=15) had between 1-5 staff working in their facility. When asked about staff wages, under half i.e. 48.1% (n=13) said they did not want to disclose the rate of pay. However, 22.2% (n=6) were paid €9-€10 per hour.

In addition, when questioned about staff qualifications, over half at 63.0% (n=17) said their staff were qualified; almost all at 89.9% (n=24) of childcare managers said they

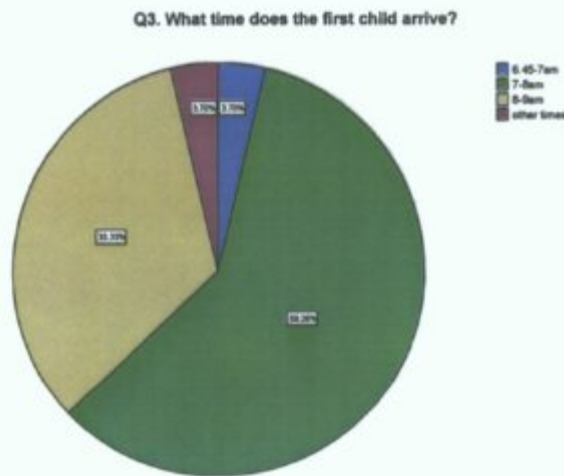
believed that staff need to have qualifications; 77.8% (n=21) said they would notice a difference between qualified and unqualified staff. Almost two thirds of staff 70.4% (n=19) had FETAC level 5, which is considered the basic qualification in childcare; FETAC level 6 is a managers course and 63.0% (n=17) childcare managers had completed this course, while 59.3% (n=16) staff had completed the Montessori qualification.

Moreover, when childcare managers were asked about training/experience; 37% (n=10) had 5-10 years on the job training; 25.9% (n=7) had between 10-20 years experience, the others had less than 5 and more than 20 years training and experience.

**4.10 TIME SPENT AT THE CHILDCARE FACILITY**

Children arrived at the childcare facilities between 7.05am and 8.30am although one facility was taking in children at 6.45am.

**Figure 4.11 Times When Children Arrived/Departed The Childcare facilities**



As was discussed in 4.2.2, children were collected from the childcare facilities in the evenings between 5.45pm and 6.30pm. Over half at 53.8% (n= 175) of respondents arrived home from work with their child after 5 pm, while 46.92% (n=150) arrived home after 6pm every day. These figures are in synchronisation with statistics from the questionnaires showing an equal amount of working parents 47.1% (n=153) were leaving their homes with their child/children in the mornings before 8 am and 9 am



respectively. This indicates that an equal amount of parents go to work for 8 am as well as 9am. However, some of the children who are left into the childcare facilities before 8am could still be there until after 6pm every day. In the current study it was not possible to verify the exact number of hours spent by each child in childcare.

#### **4.11 AGE OF CHILD/CHILDREN AT START OF CHILDCARE**

When asked what age were children when they were placed in care, most respondents mentioned between 3 and 30 months.

**Table 4.5 Ages Of Children Arriving At The Childcare Facilities**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Less than 4 months	8	29.6	29.6	29.6
Less than 6 months	10	37.0	37.0	66.7
12 months	3	11.1	11.1	77.8
Other ages	6	22.2	22.2	100.0
Total	27	100.0	100.0	

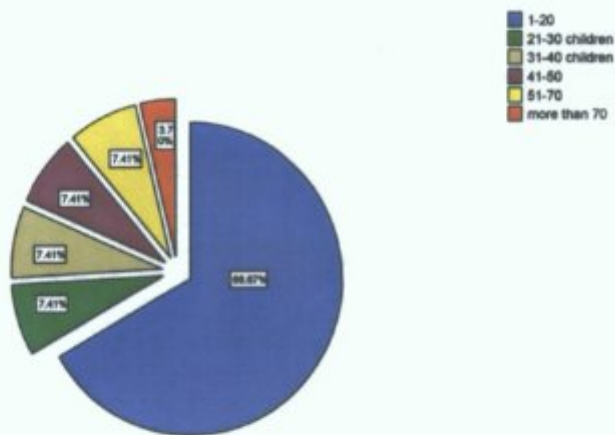
The table shows 29.6% (n=8) of childcare facilities took in children who were under 4 months; around a third i.e. 37.0% (n=10) of childcare facilities took in children aged under 6 months. These figures are in agreement with those from the questionnaires showing that 41.2% (n=134) of children were less than 6 months old when respondents started them in childcare.

#### **4.11.1 HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE HERE FOR 3.5 HOURS OR MORE PER DAY?**

Two thirds (18) childcare facilities had at least 20 and up to 90 children who were there for more for 3.5 hours per day which constitutes full day care. These figures correspond with the statistics from the questionnaires where they show the high percentage i.e. 90.5% (n= 294) of respondents saying that their child was in care for more than 3.5 hours per day. Out of 935 children, there were 632 children in full day care i.e. for more than 3.5 hours per day.

**Figure 4.12 Children In Care For More Than 3.5 Hours Per Day**

Q6. How many children are here for more than 3.5 hours per day?

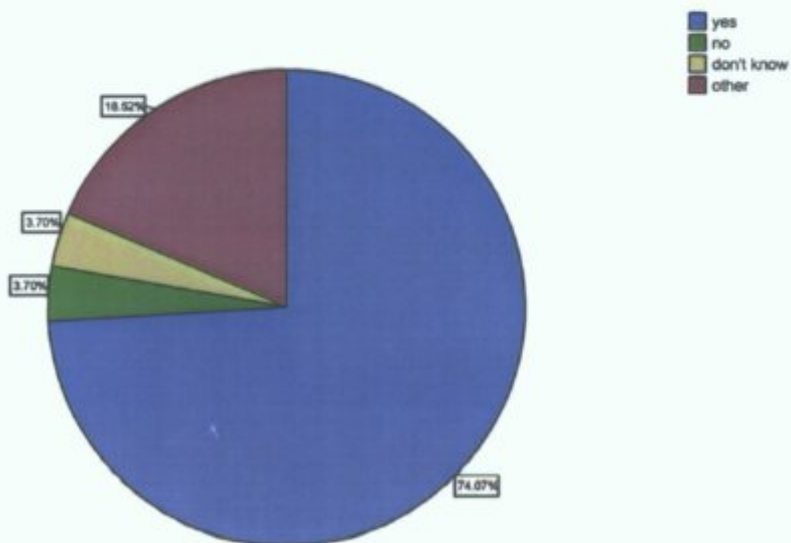


**4.12 EFFECTS OF FULL DAY CHILDCARE ON CHILDREN**

When asked if the age when a child enters childcare influences their development, a large 74.15% (n=20) answered yes to this question.

**Figure 4.13 Does The Age That The Child Enters Childcare Influence Their Development?**

Q8. In your opinion, does the age that the child enters childcare influence their development?

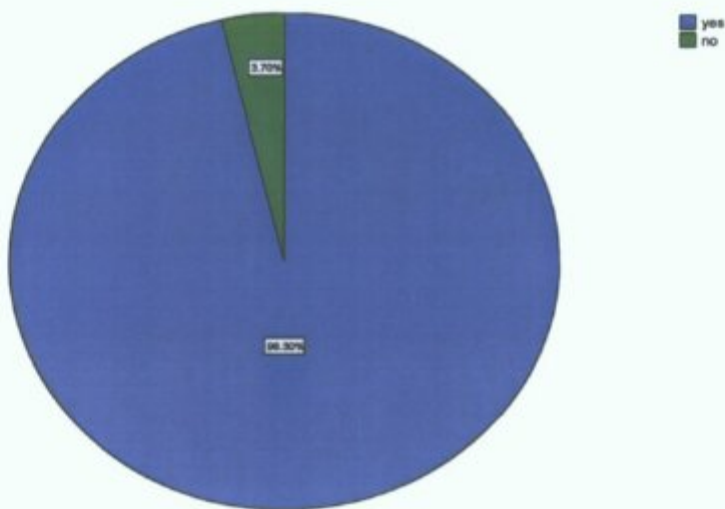


The question in the current study did not attempt to distinguish those positive or negative effects of time spent in childcare.

Childcare managers were asked if working parents were happy to leave their child/children in full day care and 26 (96.3%) out of 27 childcare managers said yes parents were more than happy to leave their child/children in full day care.

**Figure 4.14 Parents Who Are Happy To Leave Their Child/Children In Full Day Care**

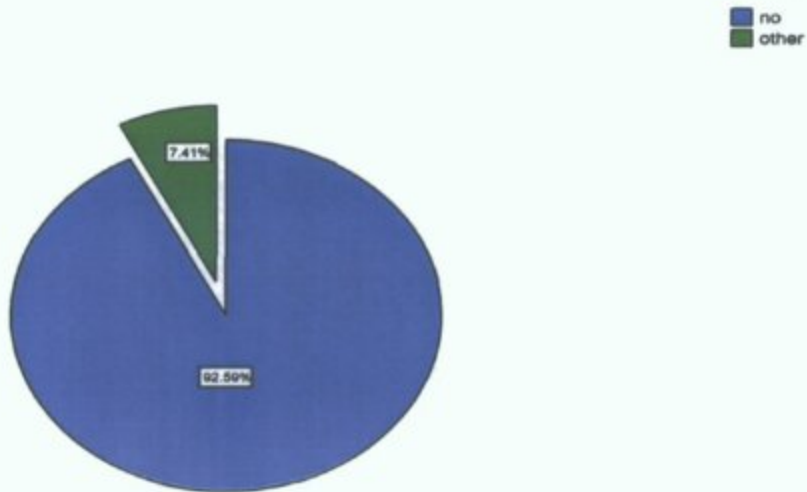
Q11. Are parents happy to leave their children in full day care?



However, childcare managers were asked if they would leave their own child/children in full day care for 3.5 hours or more per day and a high 92.59% (n=25) answered **no** to this question.

**Figure 4.15 Replies From Childcare Managers When Asked: Would You Leave Your Child In Full Day Care For 3.5 Hours Or More Per Day?**

**Q36. Would you leave your child in full day care for more than 3.5 hours per day?**



Following on, childcare managers were asked if children asked about their parents during the day while in childcare and more than half at 59.3% (n=16) answered **no** to this question.

**Table 4.6 Do Children Ask For/About Their Parents During The Day**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	6	22.2	22.2	22.2
No	16	59.3	59.3	81.5
Other	5	18.5	18.5	100.0
Total	27	100.0	100.0	

## **CHAPTER: FIVE**

### **PART ONE - DISCUSSION- QUESTIONNAIRES**

#### **5.0 INTRODUCTION.**

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the results of the findings both from the questionnaires and the interviews, as presented in Chapter 4, together with the information gleaned from the Literature Review, as presented in Chapter 2.

Firstly, to consider the questionnaires: The researcher received back 325 questionnaires and when they were analysed they yielded interesting results as will be discussed.

#### **5.1 AGE/GENDER/EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS**

As we saw in the results chapter (4.1-4.1.3) the largest group of parents who responded were those between 25 and 35 years of age and it was mostly females at 85.5% (n=278) who took part in the survey. Furthermore, we saw that 70.86% females had attained a third level education as against 61.70% of males. The literature review showed females having attained third level qualifications and the gender gap in educational attainment to the benefit of girls, which is a feature of many developed countries. This gap tends to increase at the higher levels of school education (Northern Ireland Assembly 2001).

As a result of women going to college and attaining a third level education, now there are more women entering the work force, this was revealed in the literature review, for example, (CSO: QNHS: Quarter: 4 2007) figures show that there are 60.8% % of women in the workforce now (CSO: 2007g QNHS: Quarter 3).

This is likely to be a predictive trend with consequent foreseeable need for planning to cope with future childcare needs.

The places of employment were chosen as large employment centres (Chapter 3, section 3.5.1). While statistics are not available on the number of men working in these places, it is likely to have been more than 14.5%. This is an interesting side-

issue, which shows that women were more likely to respond, perhaps because they view themselves as the primary carers in the family, or having more interest in childcare issues. A marked gender imbalance is shown in this survey.

## **5.2 CHILDREN/FAMILY COMPOSITION**

Working parents were asked details about their children.

Results show that from the 325 respondents, who answered the questions in the questionnaire about their children, there had been 519 children in total, ranging in age from 0-6months – aged 6 years of age, including families with either one, two or three children.

The literature review and the evidence from these figures here show that family trends, for example, large families as was the case in Ireland in the past are all changed now. This is corroborated by Clinch *et al* (2007) in their survey '*Understanding and Enhancing Quality of Life in Ireland*', and Larsen and Hadlow's (2003) report from the EU States showing how quality of life issues dominate, and in most families it is the case that both parents are dual earners.

In the questionnaires the research asked working parents two questions about part-time work:

1. Is part-time offered to you in your work; 65.2% said yes and 34.8% said no
2. Would part-time work appeal to you; 50.8% said yes and 49.2% said no.

Furthermore, economics are determining the need for dual earner families and as stated by the latest figures from the EBS/DKM Affordability Index which showed that by December 2007 the average first time buyer working couple in Ireland was spending 22.6% of their net income on mortgage repayments.

In addition, Finlay (2007b) at the launch of the *Da project* reports that: 'there are 189,000 lone-parent families in Ireland and (86%) of them are headed by a woman'. The picture emerging from this survey is that of small families, with single or couple parents, who have to work to pay the mortgage.

### **5.2.1 AGES OF CHILDREN AND EFFECTS OF CHILDCARE**

The researcher asked the respondents some questions about their childcare arrangements. Respondents reported sending 41.2% (n=134) of their children into

childcare when they were less than 6 months old. Furthermore, 38.77% (n=119) children were less than 12 months old when they started childcare. Figures show that 20.00% (n=72) of children were over 12 months old when they started childcare. Given that this was a relatively small sample i.e. 325 working parents, the figure of 41.2% (n=134) for children being left into childcare at under 6 months old is quite high. The current study did not have any means of measuring stress in these children but the literature review cited the following comment by Buckley (2007) on this topic: 'Children who are put into crèches at too young an age can suffer from separation anxiety and stress'. Confirming this research Lamb *et al* (2004), report from a longitudinal study that cortisol levels rose in children who were securely attached when placed in a childcare facility and parted from their mothers.

A pivotal reason contributing to children being so young when they are left in childcare could be because more women are now employed in the labour force as already stated. There are now 60.8% of women in the workforce, which is in line with the European figures at 60%. In 2007 the increase of 45,800 (+5.2%) in female employment represented almost 69% of the total increase in employment, with male employment increasing by 21,000 (+1.8%) (CSO 2007c QNHS: Quarter 4).

As stated by Leira, (2002:146): 'Mothers have changed the gender balance in breadwinning but changing the gender balance in caring for children remains a challenge for parents, work organisations and policy reform'. It can be argued that society can be judged by how it cares for its children. In the literature review Cameron (2007) was in agreement with these sentiments, and he asserts that: 'The foundation of society is, or should be, the care of children by the man and the woman who brought them into the world'. Nevertheless, the evidence from this study is that those parents were not in a position to do so. Yet, this does not seem to be a problem in other countries – particularly the Nordic countries where care of children is seen as a societal responsibility. In Ireland pre-school and after school is entirely on a voluntary basis.



### **5.2.2: MOST PARENTS CHOOSE A CHILDCARE FACILITY TO CARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN.**

In this study the results show that most respondents at (73.5% n=239) choose a child care facility to care for their child/children.

Reasons given for this choice included trained staff and a choice of services within the facilities. Respondents 48.3% (n= 157) wanted their children to be cared for by qualified and trained staff. This is corroborated by the description of quality from the National Children's Strategy who sees quality childcare as: 'Providing enhancing experiences for children and positive interactions between adults and children'. (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1999: 49).

In addition 24% (n= 78) wanted their child to be open to a wide range of learning facilities and 23% (n=75) said group care was better for their child's development. This pattern of childcare is backed up from research discovered in the literature review where the Quarterly National Survey on Childcare, CSO: May 2006 shows that: The regional differences in childcare preferences in 2005 showed that crèche or Montessori was the most popular non-parental childcare type for families with pre-school children in the Dublin (15.5%) and Mid-East (11.7%) regions. In the Border, Midland and South-East regions, unpaid relatives were the main non-parental care type used. Paid carers proved to be the predominant non-parental childcare type for families of pre-school children in the West, Mid-West and South-West regions (CSO 2005b QNHS: Quarter 1).

Childcare is and will remain a huge issue for working parents, Ireland has the third fastest population growth in the EU and a growing young population therefore demand for childcare is set to rise even further. There were 64,237 births up to 2006 (CSO 2006a Statistics).

Irish fertility rates are still very high when compared with those of other European countries, and the trends in Europe continue to be largely downward. From these statistics, it is clear that childcare is and will be an important issue for working parents in the future; therefore it is surprising that we do not hear the government making amends to provide proper childcare policy for present and future parents. Working

parents have to plan well in advance now when deciding on having a family and securing suitable childcare arrangements.

Given that childcare is such an important factor for working parents today it is imperative that the childcare provided should be of the highest quality. The literature review uncovered the consultative document, *'Towards a Framework for Early Learning'*, by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA: 2005). This should enhance the quality because childcare providers will give their views on quality and assessment which in turn will be benefit children and parents in the future who have their children in fulltime care or in pre-school before commencing school. Moreover, research indicates that children from poorer backgrounds are more likely to do better when they attend pre-school, for example, Timmins (2008) asserts that 'children in centre-based childcare have higher cognitive scores and exhibit less conduct/peer problems and more prosocial behaviour than those in maternal care'.

In addition, Trei (2004) writes about a study conducted by Stanford University by Loeb *et.al.*: "*How much is too much?*" This study exemplifies that: As policy makers move to offer all families access to free preschool, children from middle-class families will likely experience modest benefits in terms of cognitive growth, even at current levels of uneven program quality.

Furthermore, Crompton, (1990:117) points out: 'Good quality childcare must be holistic; it must focus on the whole person, not on a symptom or problem.' In addition, Friendly (2004), reports that: 'High quality childcare, provided by well-educated, sensitive early childhood educators, well supported and accompanied by a good mix of other family policies, is a benefit, not a danger, to the social and cognitive development of children across the economic spectrum'.

Moving on, the evidence from this survey shows that only 25% (n=84) of the 325 respondents who took part in the survey choose a family member/friend to care for their child/children. The main reason given by 10.5% (n= 34) of respondents for choosing a family member/friend was that they were happy to leave their child with this person; at 8.9% (n= 29) respondents also reasoned that their child/children were familiar with this person and they feel that their child/children are getting better care

and attention with this person. As stated above the statistics from this Sligo survey are similar to those from the CSO as quoted above showing paid carers (including family and friends) being used in the West of Ireland for both for the care of both pre-school and primary school children (CSO 2005b QNHS: Quarter 1).

It is surprising that more parents in the West of Ireland as opposed to Dublin chose a childcare facility as opposed to a family member/friend. One would have thought that parents would be living near a family member, giving that the West of Ireland comprises mostly rural areas and towns or could it be that in the West of Ireland there is more individualisation experienced by working parents?

### **5.2.3: TIMES PARENTS ARRIVE AT THE CHILDCARE FACILITY WITH THEIR CHILDREN**

Time at the childcare facility involved long hours, for example, possibly up to 11 hours for some children as we saw in Chapter four (4.2.2) and it was clear from the statistics that children were spending long hours in childcare. Furthermore, we can assume from the statistics that some of those parents who leave both before 8am and before 9am do not get home until after 6pm. As is stated in the literature review, these figures agree with Finlay (2007a: 3) quoting from the survey *Listening to Parents, Listening to Children – The Barnardo’s Childhood Poll*, who said: ‘where both parents were working full time they expressed less satisfaction with the time they had to be with their children’. It can be argued that if parents had choices they would reconsider leaving their child/children in full day care for up to 11 hours per day. The findings from this survey supports the above comment, for example, working parents and childcare managers commented that economics determined that they had to go to work to pay the mortgage and have a better quality of life for themselves and their children.

Moreover, the data from this survey shows that a high figure of 90.5% (n= 294) of respondents said that their child was in care for more than 3.5 hours per day. At 90% this outstanding figure amounts to most of the parents saying that their child is in fulltime day care for more than 3.5 hours per day. From the literature review it was revealed by Gilbert (2003) that: ‘Those who spend long hours in childcare may experience more stress and are at increased risk of becoming overly aggressive and

developing other behaviour problems'. In addition, we can see that some of these children would be in care from 8am until after 6pm every day. Greenman (2005 cited in Shellenbarger 2005) insists that: 'Even six hours can constitute a long day in childcare'.

Furthermore, over two-thirds at 79.4% (n=258) said that their child would remain in care for more than 3 years. The literature review uncovered studies by Gunnar (2007) who found that cortisol levels were high in children under three in full day care. Also, McCartney (2004), Peisner-Feingberg (2004), and Ahernet and Lamb (2004), found increased problem behaviour in such children but in this study the parents did not report this. However, we will see from the interviews (Chapter 5: 5.8-5.17) two childcare managers reported noticing how children who were with them part-time were not as aggressive or agitated as children who were with them for full day care for the whole week. More than half of the parents at 59.1% (n=192) said that their child would return to the childcare facility for after school care. This research is confirming that more than two thirds of the children at 79.4% (n=258) are in care from once they are 6 months old until they are over 3 years old and may still be in care until they are 12 years old seeing as 59.1% (n=192) will go to after school care in the childcare facility. Therefore, from whence they are under four months old; they go to a childcare facility, then on to primary school and remain at the childcare facility for after school care until they are approximately 12 years old. Parents are absent from their lives for much of the time. Owing to this Patricia Casey (2007) said: 'Some sociologists have suggested that in some cases parents who are absent because of their jobs try and make amends by compensating their children with money; substituting time with money is not desirable and parents worried about their children must re-engage with them to somehow monitor their children's behaviour'. If we apply this quote to the sample population, it gives cause for concern.

The literature review revealed that the number of families requiring childcare is increasing all the time. The total number of families availing of childcare in Ireland in 2002 was 398,000 in 2005 this increased to 413,000 (CSO 2005b QNHS: Quarter 1).

But, overall were working parents happy with the level of care provided by childcare professionals to their children?

The study can confirm that over half at 58% (n = 89) of respondents said that they were very satisfied. Even though, parental satisfaction does not necessarily equate with quality of provision, however good quality childcare cannot be emphasised enough in its benefits and rewards to children of all ages. In the literature review, Peisner-Feinberg (2004) asserts that research evidence supports the contention that better quality childcare is related to better cognitive and social development for children. Hand in hand with good quality childcare is the level of qualifications and training of the staff. As we will see later in Chapter 5 (5.8-5.17) the present study showed a high level of qualifications among the staff, which may explain the high level of satisfaction among parents. The level of high quality childcare can not be stressed enough because in the literature review as was demonstrated by Belsky (2005) from numerous studies: 'Placing children in an average non-maternal facility for long hours does seem to be associated with some (modest) developmental risk...'

Concurring with this evidence were studies in the US (2002) by Brooks-Gunn, Hann and Waldfogel, which found that: 'Although quality of child care, home environment, and maternal sensitivity also mattered, the negative effects of working 30 hours or more per week in the first 9 months were still found....'

As this study and others have revealed, the total length of time spent in the childcare facility needs to be assessed, in conjunction with many other variables such as parenting abilities, which makes the effects very difficult to isolate.

### **5.3 WORK.**

The researcher discovered that 57.5% (n=187) of respondents have been at work for more than 10 years. This could indicate that parents could be using fulltime childcare for this length of time and while 58% (n=189) of parents said that they were happy with the level of childcare provided, there is other research to show that work can have implications for child/parent relationships as is described in the following excerpt:

Nomaguchi (2006) examined the relationships between maternal employment, non-parental care, mother-child interactions, and preschoolers' outcomes. The research indicates that: 'Preschoolers may benefit from maternal employment, but benefits

may be offset by long hours of non-parental care and fewer positive mother-child interactions. Because of long hours spent in non-maternal childcare, good quality childcare needs to be to the forefront and in all studies good quality childcare emerged as being the key factor'

With so many parents at work, the researcher asked parents if they were part of a dual income family. It became clear that nearly all at 80.6% (n=262) of the families who took part in the survey are dual earner families. These figures do not correlate with national trends because in the QNHS on Childcare: Quarter 1: 2005 it shows that there were 96,200 couples (55.7%) at work who had pre-school children; there were 39,000 working lone parents (32.9%) with pre-school children. In the same period there were 54.2% couples and 47.7% lone parents at work who had primary school children (CSO 2005a QNHS: Quarter 1).

However, the sample in the survey represented those willing to complete a questionnaire and so entailed self-selection. Moving on, the researcher asked questions about work/family arrangements. Answers here included 44.9% (n=146) of respondents saying that their place of work offered child friendly arrangements; 53.2% (n=173) of respondents said that flexi-time was offered to them at work; 65.2% (n=212) of respondents said part time work was available and 41.8% (n=136) of respondents said that their employers offered career breaks. However, 80.9% (n=263) of respondents said that they could not afford to take a career break.

As has been shown from this survey some mothers do not take the full allocated maternity leave, which is available to them. They appear to be under financial pressure to return to work as soon as possible. Also some pregnant women continue to work right up to the time of delivery and take the time off after the birth. In research by Dipietro (2002), it states that: 'The implications of maternal stress on the postnatal environment that is created for the infant may be of greater consequence than the biological effects of prenatal exposures'. Some women who cut back or gave up work made the following comments.

A working parent in the current study questionnaires remarked about the changes in her family since she stopped working:

Having worked part-time for 5 years and now not working, I see the benefits for my two younger children and also my older child. I am there to drop them to school and collect them and spend valuable and precious time with the younger ones. There is nothing like a mothers/parents love and commitment. Enjoy your children while they are still young.

Another parent said this: 'I work part-time 19.5 hours per week; it's the best of both worlds'.

One parent recommends job sharing: 'Job sharing is fantastic; I don't understand why people cannot be allowed to take longer unpaid leave. All mothers should be at home for the first crucial years of their baby's lives. It is also very difficult to get someone to mind a young baby'. So we see a variety of patterns emerging from parents being offered child friendly work arrangements and not being able financially able to avail of them to a working parent who sings the praises of having given up her work and being rewarded by the enjoyment of her children/family. Moving on, we will consider the advantages/disadvantages of working.

### **5.3.1 ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES OF WORKING.**

When asked about the advantages of working, 72.6% (n=236) of respondents said they work to pay the mortgage. One parent gave this comment:

I feel the cost of living has increased so much that parents have no choice but to work – Mortgage, car, food, and ESB are so expensive. It would be great to have a choice to stay at home or work part-time, but until the government realise that Ireland is a very expensive country to live in, we have no choice but to work to live, people have less and less time to spend with family members/neighbours as it's a "Rat Race" now. Weekends are for catching up on household chores, and you're with your kids, most importantly.

Furthermore, 68% (n=221) of respondents said that economics have determined that they go to work. A parent made the following comment:

I would like to be able to work a 3 day week and not feel as pressurised as I do now in keeping a job going along with the current workload of everything else but owing to financial and economic circumstances as they are, I have to just keep going on as I am.

Another parent said: 'The sad thing is we as parents have no choice; we must work in order to survive!'



Interestingly, 57% (n=188) of respondents said they want to have their own money rather than being dependent on partner/spouse or the State.

From the above comments it is obvious that parents feel they have no choice except to go to work in order to pay the mortgage and have some money to provide some quality of life for themselves and their family, given that house prices and the cost of living is so high in Ireland.

When questioned about the disadvantages of working the following figures were quoted: 78.5% (n=255) of respondents said that they are missing out on their children growing up and 77.5% (n=252) of respondents said that they don't spend long enough with their child/children.

One working parent said:

Ideally, I would prefer to be a full time mum to my son, but unfortunately have to work to pay the bills, so knowing he is in an excellent day care facility (which I am happy that he is currently) puts my mind at ease, although I do feel very guilty missing out on so much!!!

Another parent said:

As a working mum, I have no choice but to work full time for financial reasons. I would welcome the opportunity to work part-time and have more time with my babies!

Furthermore, 57.5% (n=187) of respondents said that they are gone for the full day.

A comment from this parent shows that she would like to be at home with her children, just in the summer holidays but she cannot do it:

Getting the children cared for during the summer holidays can be difficult. I would like to be at home with them and it would mean having more money but I cannot get off work even though I would do it less the money. I think this should be given to parents when they have small children.

These parents are saying that financially they can not afford to stay at home with their children, not even during the summer holidays even though they acknowledge that they do not spend enough time with their children and are missing out on them growing up.

## **5.4 GOVERNMENT AND WORKING PARENTS**

When respondents were asked if they thought that the government was doing enough for working parents, nearly all at 96.9% (n=315) overwhelmingly said no:

Parents made the following comments:

Childcare in this country is not a priority! I live in a small town where there is no crèche, no pre-school group and very limited childcare options. I work in the college that has no crèche and no commitment to working mums!

The government should provide more childcare money.

The government is doing nothing to encourage lone parents to work.

More flexibility should be encouraged in the workplace. Parental leave should be encouraged and allowed to be broken up into stages, which would make it affordable.

In my job there is no flexibility and therefore I find it hard to cope with full time work, three children and a home to keep. I was fortunate enough to have my mother at home growing up and it saddens me that my children can't have the same. There is a lot to be said for a light on, and a fire lit on a cold winter evening instead of everyone arriving together to the dark and cold house, it's not a home.

People are being brought up with very high expectations – causes pressure and problems. We must be prepared to take personal responsibility for bringing up our own children; we cannot expect the government to keep giving us handouts. Long hours in childcare, over a long time deny children the opportunity to learn life skills of cooking and how to relate in a family context.

Children are our future. They need all the care and attention from the early stages. Parents should be given more needs to be successful in the upbringing stages of their lives.

It is common knowledge that successive Irish governments have had a long time to consider the 'childcare problem' but nothing much has changed as demonstrated by Hayes (2002:71) in the literature review: 'the 'childcare problem' has been around as a serious issue for parents and children in Ireland since the mid-1970's; it is precisely because there has been insufficient debate about the nature of the impact of changes...'

Furthermore, very few parents or childcare managers commented on the benefit of the annual €1,000 (now €1,100) Early Childcare Supplement which was given to parents by the government to go towards pre-school costs in 2007 (Department of Finance, 2007). It could be inferred that it has had little impact, despite good intentions.

Furthermore, when respondents were asked about the changes that they would recommend from the government for working parents 86.8% (n=283) of respondents said there should be a system of tax credits on childcare costs for working parents allowing them to work less and spend more time with their child/children.

This figure indicates that parents want to be at home with their children at the crucial times in their lives. Research by Bowlby (1988) would suggest that it is essential for children to start off with a secure base. Furthermore, Winnicott (1986) also emphasised that it was best: 'Home is where we start from; it is good to start off with a secure base'.

A respondent in the survey made the following revelation:

I think it would be wonderful if there were a government who provided childcare facilities with trained childcare/playschool teachers, and staff had full Garda background checks as standardised. Also wouldn't it be great if working mums were paid to stay home while children were too young to attend school or paid even a percentage of their normal earning capacity at their workplace e.g. 75% of usual earnings.

Moreover, 62.2 % (n=202) of respondents said subsidise childcare costs and cap private childcare fees.

A respondent gave the following comment on subsidising childcare costs: 'The government should subsidise pre-school and after school care like most other European countries'.

Also, 52.6% (n=171) of respondents suggested the government should increase maternity and paternity leave until the baby is 1 year old and introduce more parental leave

Respondents made the following suggestions in relation to maternity/paternity leave:

Increase paid paternity leave for fathers (3 days at present).

My daughter has been in a crèche since she was 3.5 months old. I took a break from work for five months and my daughter seemed bored and cranky at some point every day. I took it that she missed crèche life and her friends. Since returning to crèche she obviously is tired in evenings but is a much happier child as she has something to do for the full day.

I am currently on Maternity leave and have to exist on social welfare maternity benefits payments of €280 per week less than half my working salary as my employer does not provide any top-up payments. No government minister wants to dwell on this, it is less than the minimum wage and with the baby now to care for it really does not make sense or it is not encouraging to have more than one pregnancy. So much for equality for mothers in Ireland!

My arrangements are not full-time all week. I take one day Parental leave per week. My husband works shift and is therefore able to care for our child a lot of the time I am working. Our child is with his Aunt approximately two days per week. I feel I am in a lucky position to have this arrangement. I would seriously re-consider if I would work at all if I had to leave my child in full time care.

Thanks to Parental and flexi leave, I can take one day off per week. My husband works four days a week as well and he has a day with our child. Then we leave our child for the other three days at the child minders (his cousins).

Paternity leave is of no use unless it is paid. Capping private childcare fees would only result in fewer places available and ultimately affect childcare quality.

From the various comments above it is clear that parents want to see different issues addressed. Some parents feel that there are not enough professional childcare facilities with qualified staff and that childcare should be subsidised. However, everyone will not benefit from every proposed change, for example, lone parents would not benefit if tax credits were introduced because couples would be entitled to more credits than them. In addition, it is questionable if more parents would avail of extended maternity leave given that at the moment some mothers are returning to work before their present leave has expired.

Furthermore, in the literature review, research by Waldfogel (2005); Kamerman (2005) and Ruhm (1998) all expressed the view that Maternity and Paternal leave provide long lasting benefits for both the child and the parents.

## **5.5 QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES**

Respondents were questioned about how they would measure quality of life for their child, their family and themselves. Almost all at 98% (n=321) said having a healthy child was a primary factor; 70.5% (n=229) said it was important that their child has a good circle of friends while 37.8% (n=123) cited a good primary education as an important factor in quality of life for their child.

Health again was the main measure of quality of life for their family with 98.5% (n=320) cited it as being most important. Furthermore, 53.8% (n=175) mentioned having dinner together at weekends as important while 52% (n=169) of respondents said taking part in children's activities were important.

Thirdly, health was noted as the most important factor too for themselves as parents with 99.1% (n=322) citing it. Also 57.5% (n=187) of respondents said meeting friends was important to them while 56% (n=184) cited having their own money as important as regards quality of life for them. When asked if they were happy with their quality of life overall 74.2% (n=241) answered yes to this question with a respondent making the following comment: 'I am happy with the quality of life that I have. I think that women feel guilty no matter what they do – go to work – stay at home'.

It may seem surprising that so many parents were satisfied overall given the previous responses where they were saying that they were missing out on their children growing up and them not spending enough quality time with them. In addition, other factors appeared to inhibit their quality of life, for example, travelling long distances to work and being gone for a full day. It is also surprising considering the levels of stress reported by respondents. A future study could explore such issues further.

## **5.6 STRESS**

In the survey, respondents were asked if they felt they were stressed. Over two-thirds at 72.3% (n=235) answered yes to this question. The main reason given by respondents 57.25% (n=186) for being stressed was because they were not spending enough time with their children/families owing to having to put them into childcare/nurseries. The literature review notes that Biddulph (2006) asserts: 'Putting children under the age of three in nurseries risks damaging their development'. His view is based on growing evidence of increased aggression, antisocial behaviour and other problems among children who have spent a large part of their infancy being cared for away from home. He argues that such children may have problems developing close relationships later.

In addition, DiPietro (2002) suggests that development problems in childhood may have their origins in stress-related birth outcomes (such as preterm birth and foetal growth restrictions) or may be a direct consequence of stress effects on developing foetal brain systems.

The second reason given for stress was time management with 49.6% (n= 161) of respondents being affected by it. In third place was financial worries with 46.5%

(n=151) of respondents being stressed by this. Finally, 34.1% (n=111) respondents felt stressed when off work owing to their child/children being sick.

A parent felt upset about the following stress: 'I am stressed out and not happy having to pay for the crèche when my child is off sick and not happy having to pay for the crèche when on maternity leave to keep place for child even though they are not at the crèche yet.'

Furthermore other respondents in the survey commented about being stressed as follows:

I'm stuck, I am not happy because I do feel I could spend more time with my family and child, I feel his life is slipping away while I'm at work and soon I'm gona wake up and he'll be gone to college. But I have to work if I want him to get an education in order for him to go to college and to give him the best in life. I'd love to be able to cut my hours to maybe 19/20 hours per week but I can't!

It's a hard job to work full time (39.5 hrs), three children, and travel 1.5 hours to work daily and run a home, HELP!!!

When my child starts school in September, I might have to go part-time, as I have no one to collect her from school. I cannot afford to go part time, but having no one to collect her will put me under awful stress with work, traveling home on time to collect her as well as all the financial stress I am under as it is.

I am a single parent so time and energy can be low at times. If I didn't have to work so much I wouldn't be so tired (I also work from the house at night when my child is asleep). I think childcare costs are a disgrace!

The samples from the above comments from over two thirds of the respondents who said they were stressed clearly indicate that parents are not happy with their situations but they strive to keep going as there is no alternative given the economic climate in Ireland at present. For them it is a sad scenario – leaving their children in childcare with mostly strangers who are paid much less than they themselves get per hour, yet they entrust them to care for their children for long hours for all of their formative years. Then there is the question of attachment? How can we know for sure that the children are not more attached to the childcare workers as opposed to the parents? It could not be wrong to assume this because we are told in this survey that some children are spending up to 11 hours per day in childcare. The future will tell what the repercussions will be.

In the USA, Ahnert and Lamb (2004:3) assert that infant–parent attachments are formed in the first year of life and thus attachment theory has particular relevance to infant care practices. In addition, Ahnert and Lamb (2004:3) say:

Many theorists note that child care may also be problematic for toddlers and preschoolers also because non-parental child care necessarily disrupts the continuity of access to primary attachment figures; first of all, it can damage primary attachments and thus hinder socio-emotional development.

Furthermore, Ahnert and Lamb argue that unrelated care providers are, on average, not as committed to their child care responsibilities, as parents would be. Sociobiologists further argue that quality of care is a function of the degree of relatedness between care providers and children such that the poorest quality of care should be expected from unrelated care providers, including paid teachers, babysitters, and nannies. A much more positive view of child care has been advanced by cognitive theorists who stress the value of well-designed stimulation and instruction on the mental and communicative development of children. (Ahnert and Lamb, (2004:3).

Whether or not children in child care develop and maintain good relationships with their parents depends upon parents' ability to provide sensitive care at home. Furthermore, it is important that parents establish a balance between home and child care settings, and that they themselves continue to provide types of intimate interaction seldom available in child care centres. Long hours in child care and stressful parent-child relationships are associated with angry aggression in preschool children, whereas good relationships with care providers help minimize behaviour problems and aggression.

Care providers, of course, are able to develop significant relationships with children but the quality of those relationships depends on the care providers' behaviour towards the group as a whole, rather than on the quality of interactions with individual children. Indeed, the emerging relationships between care providers and children reflect the characteristics and dynamics of the group whereas infant–parent attachments seem to be influenced more directly by dyadic interactions (Ahnert and Lamb, 2004:3).



## 5.7 CONCLUSION OF QUESTIONNAIRE DISCUSSION

Most of the working parents who responded were females who had a third level education and who are in employment for 10 years or more, thus needing childcare for a considerable length of time. The preferred choice of childcare was in a childcare facility and they cite the reasons for this being the qualifications and training of the staff.

Quality of life issues were dominated by a deep appreciation of the importance of health for all the family, by all respondents. While part-time/flexi-time and career breaks in work arrangements were offered, most parents could not afford to take them, as they need to work in order to pay the mortgage. Parents would like to be at home with their child/children but economics have determined that they stay at work. This results in stress and the study has shown that most parents are stressed and feel that they are not spending enough time with their family.

In summary, this may have practical implications for the government and for future policies. Parents feel they are not getting enough help from the government in order to achieve a work/life balance, as one parent said:

There is not enough government support for parents. Employers do not care enough about work/life balance. They pay lip service by saying that they implement initiatives but then they limit their availability. Work hours are too long. Many have set work hours but depending on level they are always under pressure to work longer and harder for example, I go in during the night to catch up on work that couldn't be complete during the day as I am not prepared to compromise my time with the family. Meetings are frequently set for after 5.30pm. Often I won't accept to go to the meetings. Childcare costs are huge. I pay more for childcare than for the mortgage every month (>€1,200/month).

This questionnaire survey has shown that there are serious gaps in work life balance and quality of life issues in Ireland. Parents are paying the price because mothers have entered the workforce in greater numbers, but no allowances or amends are made for this societal shift, so that there can be appropriate provision for their childcare needs. It is evident that unlike years ago now women are attaining third level degrees and are expecting to be in the workforce for most of their lives. Furthermore, women are waiting until they are older to start their families because they want to stabilise or advance their careers first. Despite choosing to start a family, often at a later age, they still avail of paid childcare for their babies and yet they voice regret at missing their children while they work.

As we will see in chapter five, part two childcare managers seem to envy these women and think they should be paying more to have their children cared for at their facilities because they point out all the extra activities and services that they provide for the children. They give the impression that they are doing the main body of the parenting work that should be done by the parents. Furthermore, on one hand there are studies showing great benefits from good quality childcare and on the other hand studies indicate that long hours in childcare resulting in high levels of cortisol and aggressive behaviours could be damaging children. The children's views would be interesting here, for example, how will these conflicting views be manifest in these children in the future and how will they view their parents and society? These issues will be further examined in part two when the interviews from the childcare managers are discussed.

## **CHAPTER: FIVE**

### **PART TWO - DISCUSSION- INTERVIEWS**

#### **5.8 INTRODUCTION**

As we saw in chapter 4 (4.7) all but one of the 28 childcare managers who were registered with the HSE in and around Sligo town took part in this survey plus two in Letterkenny. This provides us with a huge amount of data. Therefore, in this part of the chapter the researcher discusses the results from the interviews with the 27 childcare managers who took part.

At the time of fieldwork on interviews with childcare managers, there were 935 children in childcare across the three types of childcare facilities. One childcare facility in Sligo town had 130 children on their books but with an average attendance of 90 daily, one facility in Letterkenny cared for 80 per day and the childcare manager there told the researcher that they had plans to start a new building adjacent to the present one in which they would cater for 80 more children on the same site. Almost a thousand children (935) were availing of childcare in this small sample of 27 childcare providers, which is quite large considering the town populations. The presentation will be interspersed with references collected from relevant literature in each area as well as quotes from the childcare managers.

From the interviews as well as the questionnaires it was evident that both parents have to work in order to keep pace with the changes that have occurred in Ireland over the past five to ten years.

#### **5.9 TYPE OF CHILDCARE FACILITY**

Childcare is in demand and in this survey the parents had the choice of private childcare facilities, public childcare facilities or home child minders. In total there were twenty-seven childcare managers across the facilities who took part in the survey. The researcher interviewed seventeen managers from private childcare facilities, fifteen of the managers worked in childcare facilities in and around Sligo town and two worked in Letterkenny, Co Donegal. She interviewed four managers from public childcare facilities and six home childminders. This small amount i.e. six

comprises all the home childminders who were on the HSE register and qualified to care for children in their own home. Of the six who took part in the survey, most acknowledged that there were many un-registered childminders providing a good service and are operating like this for years. However, they also said: ‘This takes away from us who are registered. The reason why childminders do not want to register is that there are too many regulations’.

## **5.10 SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CHILDCARE FACILITY**

Parents chose a childcare facility to care for their child/children because of the variety of services that were being provided, as noted in Chapter four, section 4.8.

An important factor for working parents when choosing a childcare facility for their child/children was the services provided by the childcare facility. In this survey, all 27 childcare providers offered extra services, for example:

- Dropping off and collecting from primary schools
- Breakfast
- Hot meals (dinner)
- After School care
- Summer/holiday care

As we saw in chapter 4 (4.10) the statistics showed that 85 children across the three types of childcare facilities were dropped off and collected from primary schools; 257 children had breakfast - in one facility where 16 children were cared for, the interviewee said: *All babies and children arrive in pyjamas, we have to change the nappies (sometimes dirty) and dress and feed the children.* In addition, 23 out of 27 childcare providers provided a hot meal (usually a dinner) for the children, and 623 children received hot meals including those who returned home from primary schools. While conducting the interviews the researcher was taken on a tour around the new purpose built private and public childcare facilities. In all facilities there was a purpose built kitchen where a fully qualified chef/cook prepared and cooked nutritious fresh food every day.

Two hundred and fifty three children attended after school in the childcare facility where they were being cared for. Some childcare managers said that in some facilities after school involved the children receiving some tuition and supervision with

homework, a rest and play period and a light snack was served. Children were collected and taken to the childcare facility and were there until they were collected by a parent in the evening. Usually children remain in after school services until they were twelve/thirteen years old and leaving the primary school to go to post-primary schools. This figure coincides with figures from the questionnaire survey showing 59.1% (n=192) of respondents saying their child would return to the childcare facility for after school care. Also 79.4% (n=258) of respondents said their child would remain in care for more than 3 years. Summer/holiday care was provided by 23 childcare facilities and 535 children availed of it.

It is evident from these statistics that parents are leaving their child/children in care (in some cases) from when they are less than four months old until they are twelve/thirteen years old. Parents want a childcare facility where the staff are qualified and trained, a facility that is accessible and that can stay open for long hours. In speaking to the childcare managers the researcher found that while they are already providing a variety of services, some hoped to introduce new services, for example, opening on Saturdays/Sunday and Bank Holidays as well as providing open care where parents could drop off children while they went shopping around town or for a day out shopping. Other suggestions mentioned were Drama, horse riding and Irish Dancing/Music classes. Childcare managers said: 'Parents would gladly pay for these extra curricular activities because they would want their children to avail of them but they did not have the time to take them to the activities themselves'. Another childcare manager said: 'Parents want us to do everything for the child/children, even have a birthday party in the childcare facility for the child to save the parents the time and hassle of doing this at home'. So there is room for question here regarding bonding and attachment theory because it is evident that children are spending long hours in childcare. During interviews with childcare managers, three of them mentioned in passing that they are thinking about and have had requests from parents to open at weekends. If Saturdays and Sundays are an option it seems they will have even less time at home with their parents. This child development process is in contrast to Bowlby and Winnicott, as in the literature review, who advocate a secure base with the parents. It seems that the childcare workers are becoming the primary care givers. Furthermore, in terms of modelling family behaviour it will be difficult

for children to achieve this given that they do not seem to have time/space to see it enacted by their parents.

### **5.11 COSTS, QUALIFICATIONS, TRAINING/EXPERIENCE IN CHILDCARE**

In choosing a childcare facility, important issues for working parents were: Costs, qualifications, experience and training of staff. The researcher found that the cost of childcare was a major issue for working parents taking part in this survey. From the research it is evident that costs vary but mostly it is between €120 and €157 per week for one child. Babies are more expensive to care for with costs ranging from €130-€150 per week for one baby. Most childcare providers were charging €5 or more per hour.

These costs correspond with the reports from the literature review; with figures showing the average cost of paid childcare in Ireland in the first quarter of 2005 costing just over €120 per child per week (CSO 2005a QNHS: Quarter 1).

The literature review revealed that working parents in Ireland are spending up to 30% of their total income on childcare; in comparison in Sweden it is 2% (OECD, 2007b). It could be argued here that childcare professionals are not adequately paid for the work/services that they are providing for working parents. However, parents are paying as much as they can afford and as the literature review states, in some cases one person of the dual earners is working solely to pay for the childcare. This too has implications for the future because some couples are only having one child or in some cases not in a position to financially afford to have any children.

Most childcare providers were providing food, for example a dinner for this price and as already stated the chef/cook prepared the fresh food on a daily basis in the purpose built kitchen in the centre. However, the literature review revealed that working parents could be contributing to obesity in children. As described in the literature review, chapter two, section 2.6.1 the British Medical Association (2002) conducted a study at the Institute of Child Health in London. They followed 13,000 children and found that offspring of mothers who work long hours have less access to healthy

foods and physical activity and are more likely to be found in front of the television set.

It can easily be seen how parents could be contributing to child obesity, for example, if we consider the stressed out parent who has just arrived home in the evening at 7pm to a cold house that they left at 6am; now they are just after travelling up to an hour in the car and maybe with an agitated child/children. A reaction would be to give the child/children convenience foods and put them sitting in front of the television while the parents try to get the dinner as well as doing other household chores. However, this is speculative as this question was not explored in this present study.

Staff ratios were good across all childcare facilities. Most had between 1-5 staff members employed. There was 163 staff working across the 3 childcare facility types interviewed in the survey. The researcher asked the childcare managers about the wages being paid to staff. Of those who disclosed the wages, most staff were paid between €8.50-€10.00 per hour. Given these figures, it was obvious that childcare workers are paid low wages and the reasons cited for this by the childcare managers was:

The childcare workers wages are so low because fees are low, the margins are tight and that is all that we can afford to pay after overheads are paid out of the fees received in, also childcare work is very much undervalued.

No one would want to do our job.

All childcare managers said that they should be paid more money for the services that they provide to parents, commenting as follows:

If you compare our fees with Dublin we are getting very little. For example they get €1,000 per month per child; 5 respondents said it should be €240 for babies and €220 per child thereafter, to adequately support the services provided.

Parents should get a subsidy to send their children in to us; childcare should be regulated.

I would like more money but parents cannot afford to pay more.

I charge €120 but feel I should be charging €140 because the children are here from 8am until 6pm and that is for 5 days per week.

We can see that childcare managers in the North West are aware of childcare managers/facilities in Dublin. The Sligo managers feel that in comparison to Dublin



they are not paid enough for what they do; however, they also realise that the parents cannot afford to pay them anymore.

Most childcare providers i.e. 66.7% (n=18) agreed that the government should be providing more funding for childcare and especially for public childcare. The reason they thought that public childcare facilities needed the funding was because: 'People like the community because it's cheaper and it's not for profit'.

In relation to this comment, in July 2007 Mr Smith (Minister of State for Children) introduced a new subvention scheme worth €153 million under the current EU co-funded EOCF support scheme. It is allocated to community not for profit childcare facilities to provide quality childcare at reduced rates for disadvantaged parents. Subventions for full day care place will range from €80 to €30 (€110 to €60 for a child under 1 year) per week with pro rata subventions for shorter day care services ((Department of Health and Children (2007a). This may have the effect of making private childcare more expensive, or making public childcare unavailable to those not considered disadvantaged.

In relation to Community not for profit childcare most childcare providers said:

There is more demand for public because they pay nominal fees. It's funded by the government, they get money towards equipment and staff wages and we can't compare. So they can charge €20 for a week for 2.5 hrs per day per week. 2.5 hrs here is over €50.

Demand is for public, it's cheaper, and government run so you'd have a better environment.

If the funding was across the board for both you could pay your staff.

In addition, there were disadvantages cited with using public childcare facilities, as is explained by comments from childcare providers:

Public are only open for a few hours in comparison to private facilities who are open from early until late; children have to be toilet trained to go to the public places; public does not do school drop off and collecting like is done in private facilities and also in public it's a much bigger place, we are better because we are smaller.

There is more demand for public, private is too expensive.

Some childcare managers attributed their high cost to having to pay rates/refuse/water charges. They felt that these services should be provided to them at a reduced rate because they are providing childcare services. Also the private childcare providers and the home childminders complained that the public/community childcare facilities get more money/grants from the government and their buildings are purpose built, thus they can afford to charge parents less than what they have to get to cover their expenses. As is seen on page 35 in the literature review, these issues are discussed and it is clear that the government is failing to provide adequate support to working parents.

Moving on to discuss staff qualification, the researcher asked the childcare managers about what qualification their staff had. It was evident that most staff had qualifications. The childcare managers explained that by being qualified they meant that all staff had completed the FETAC Level 5 (previously known as level 2) and in some cases the FETAC Managers course, which is Level 6. FETAC Level 5 is the level which is the desired minimum childcare qualification; there is no minimum requirement in either law or regulation in Ireland.

From the literature review Trei (2004), Crompton (1990) and Friendly (2004) among several others all stress the importance of fully qualified and trained staff which is essential in providing good quality childcare. Childcare managers acknowledge and accept that all their staff should have qualifications. In relation to this question, a high 88.9% (n=24) of childcare managers thought that childcare staff needed qualifications. Further to this, childcare staff were aware of providing a good quality service with fully qualified staff. Seventy seven point eight per cent (n=21) of managers commented that they would notice a difference between qualified and unqualified staff citing an example of students who would come on work/college placements and who would be noticed as not having the same knowledge/expertise to provide the required and expected good service. Furthermore, Seventy seven point eight per cent (n=21) of managers commented that they would not employ workers unless they had qualifications. As well as have the FETAC Level 5 qualification, most staff, at 70.4% (n=19) had the Montessori qualification. In addition to this, the childcare managers' course is the FETAC Level 6 course, the survey showed that 63.0% (n=17) childcare managers had completed this course. Childcare managers

noted that at 37% (n=10) of their staff had 5 to 10 years on the job experience of working in a childcare setting with children. Some older childcare providers had more than 20 years experience working in a childcare facility.

So quality, with fully qualified and trained staff are available and even demanded; yet childcare managers seem to say parents are unwilling or unable to pay for this quality service. The question is: 'why does childcare appear to be so undervalued and yet parents know and want staff who are qualified and trained to care for their children'?

### **5.12 TIME SPENT AT THE CHILDCARE FACILITY**

The interviews proved that some children were spending long hours in the childcare facilities. As we saw in chapter four (4.8) children mostly arrived at the childcare facilities between 7.05am and 8.30am except one childcare facility in Sligo town was taking in children at 6.45am. The children were collected in the evenings between 5.45pm and 6.30pm. Seventeen childcare facilities (63.0%) reported children being collected after 6pm; while nine childcare managers reported that 33.3% of children were collected after 5pm. This would indicate that some children could have been in the childcare facilities from as early as 7.05am until 6.30pm although this was not definitely established. This constitutes up to eleven hours per day for the child/children to be in non-parental care. In some facilities the child/children would experience a change over of staff. These figures are similar to the results from the questionnaires with the working parents where they showed that almost half, 47.1% (n=153) of the parents leave their homes with their child before 8am and half before 9am respectively. In the working parents' questionnaires more than half at 53.8% (n=175) arrived home from work with their child after 5 pm each day. Furthermore, as with the questionnaires these statistics corroborate with the research uncovered in the literature review where Ross (2007), among others highlights the difficulties faced by working parents who commute to work and especially in the commuter belts of large cities, for example, Dublin, Cork and Limerick. However, parents were returning to work early from maternity leave and leaving very young children into the childcare facilities.

### **5.13 AGE OF CHILD/CHILDREN AT START OF CHILDCARE**

When asked what age were children when they were placed in care, most respondents mentioned between 3 and 30 months. The researcher learned that eight (29.6%) of childcare facilities took in children who were under 4 months while ten (37.0%) of childcare facilities took in children aged under 6 months. These figures are in agreement with those from the questionnaires, which show that 41.2% (n=134) of children were less than 6 months old when they started childcare.

Another issue, which is highlighted here, too is that these circumstances would appear to not be conducive to mothers who wish to breastfeed their babies. Ruhm (2002) states: 'Maternal employment, for example, is associated with decreases in the frequency and duration of breast-feeding. Since the consumption of human milk is linked to better health and possibly enhanced cognitive development, returning to work during the first year of a child's life may not be a desirable option for mothers'. However, in this study questions were not asked in relation to breastfeeding mothers.

#### **5.13.1 CHILDREN IN CARE FOR 3.5 HOURS OR MORE PER DAY**

Two-thirds (18) childcare facilities reported that they had at least 20 children and up to 90 in their care every day who were there for more for 3.5 hours per day, which constitutes full day care. This amounted to two thirds out of a total of 935 children given that 547 children were there for full day care in the childcare facility as well as the 85 children across all the facilities who were dropped off and collected from the childcare facilities to the primary schools each day. This is a high figure given that only 27 childcare managers were interviewed. It is clear that some children out of the 547 could be in full day care for up to eleven hours per day as discussed above. These figures correspond with the statistics from the questionnaires where they showed the high percentage i.e. 90.5% (n= 294) of respondents saying that their child was in care for more than 3.5 hours per day. While the questionnaires were given to working parents in and around Sligo town and to the managers of the childcare facilities were living in and around Sligo town (apart from two in Letterkenny) the researcher can not assume that the children in the childcare facilities were all belonging to the working parents who took part in the questionnaire survey.

## **5.14 EFFECTS OF FULL DAY CHILDCARE ON CHILDREN**

In this survey it appears that most children are now in full day care as opposed to for example sessional care which could be for a few hours for example from 9.30am-12.30pm. In the literature review concerns were raised as regards long hours in care. Purcell (2001) comments: 'In the UK there is concern for the welfare of children in the context of the long hours spent in non-parental care from a very young age'. Furthermore, from the literature review, Gilbert (2003); Shellenberger (2005); Silver (2003); McCarthy (2004); Peisner-Feinberg (2004) and Ahneret and Lamb (2004) would all have concerns for children who spend long hours in care. Also Biddulph (2006) has said: 'Putting children under the age of three in nurseries risks damaging their development'. An important factor in full day care is the age that the child is placed in care and how/if it affects their overall development.

### **5.14.1 DOES THE AGE THE CHILD ENTERS CHILDCARE INFLUENCE THEIR DEVELOPMENT?**

The researcher got a large response with 74.1% (n=20) of childcare managers answering **yes** to this question, meaning a positive influence. The following is an example of the wide range of comments from the childcare managers:

Parents wouldn't have the child centred stuff at home to stimulate them.

It's much better if they are young when you get them as you can do so much with them.

They get more experience dealing with their own age group; this helps them to solve problems at that age group.

It's no good if a child only starts 6 months before Primary school because it gives them no time to develop to be ready for school; the childcare staff monitor everything, they talk to the parents, the HSE and professionals, and they go to meetings.

Children who are integrated develop much better e.g. walking, talking etc and their ability to interact socially is much better.

Definitely, for example, the Irish toddler, the family house is non-existent, not like Asia. It's sad, I don't agree with it, that's why I try to have a home environment here – a schedule, for example, Monday its Drawing/Rice day; Tuesday its Painting/Pancake day, Wednesday etc. it's sad that parents work. To address nature I take them outside. When the parents are at work, they have nobody to imitate. We let the kids cut up the vegetables for their soup and they help to make it. The approach of the adult is in the greatest learning; the younger they are when we get them the better it is because they settle better to a routine.

Even if we get an 8 or 9-month-old child, they are too old, they are strange and it takes them longer to settle.

It progresses an only child and my own children have come on great since they are here with other children.

It can be seen from these comments that childcare managers are eager to get the children as young as possible because they want to get them into their routine and structures as soon as possible and have them well settled before they start primary school.

However, Belsky (2005), reports in the literature review that: 'Placing children in an average non-maternal care facility for long hours does seem to be associated with some (modest) developmental risk, especially with respect to the mother-child relationships'. This is re-iterated by Buckley (2007) who said: 'Children who are put into childcare facilities at too young an age can suffer from separation anxiety and stress'. CSO Tables (2006b) figures show Ireland has 112,541 three-to-four-year-olds. Furthermore, Gibbons (2007) states: 'The first years of a child's life are the most critical in terms of learning and development'. In addition, according to Purcell (2001: 168) 'while childhood is fleeting, it should be nurtured and protected by the law'. So is non-parental childcare good for child/children?

#### **5.14.2 IN YOUR OPINION, IS NON-PARENTAL CARE GOOD FOR A CHILD**

The researcher asked the childcare managers for their views on this question; 29.6% n=8 answered yes and 3.7% n=1 answered no. Clearly respondents were unwilling to give a categorical yes or no answer to this question, understandably since it is their livelihood but 63% (n=17) elaborated on their answers other than yes/no; listed are a representative sample their answers:

Children are fine because parents tend to make up for the time they are not with them by spending on them – parents feel guilty.

Parents and children miss out. It's a means to an end nowadays because both parents are working, parents at work or at college. A minority of children are at home now. It depends how they prioritise things now with modern living how it's gone.

I notice that the children that are here part-time are not as aggressive or as stressed as the children who are here fulltime 5 days per week.

I have 3 children here full time - 5 days a week. I think that parents should avail of parental leave. They have all the waking hours here and really have only Saturday and Sunday. Children grow up too fast.

I tell the parents by hinting about milestones that I have noticed. Sure, I toilet train the children here as well. I do everything that they should see and be doing. Parents miss out on all that.

I don't know about babies. I don't think it's good; I do it/work at home because I prefer my kids to be with me. My friends have to go to work and leave their children, they would rather not but they have to.

Parents are riddled with guilt, they ring here a few times per day, we know by them.

It appears that childcare managers are ambivalent about the children whom they are caring for in their facilities. On one hand, they appear to be annoyed with the parents given that they are expected to do so much for them; they seem to feel sorry for the children who are left there for long hours and yet they say they are doing everything with the children for the parents.

In the literature review Nomaguchi (2006) discussed *The Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* (N = 1,248). The study examined the relationships between maternal employment, non-parental care, mother-child interactions, and preschoolers' outcomes. They found that maternal employment especially full-time employment was related to care by non-relatives resulting in longer hours in school settings, fewer positive mother-child interactions, and less reading with parents at ages 2 and 4. Controlling for these variables, maternal employment was related to children's lower hyperactivity, more prosocial behavior, and less anxiety at age 4, although little relationship was found at age 2. The results indicate that preschoolers may benefit from maternal employment, but benefits may be offset by long hours of nonparental care and fewer positive mother-child interactions.

In addition, McCartney (2004) reports that: 'Effects are complex and vary primarily as a function of the quality of care provided. In other words, whether childcare poses a risk to children, protects them from disadvantaged homes, or promotes good developmental outcomes depend on the quality of care'. In continuing this theme,



childcare managers were asked for their views on the relationship between a baby and its parents.

### **5.14.3 DOES FULL DAY CARE AFFECT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A BABY AND ITS PARENTS?**

When the researcher posed the following question: In your opinion, does full day care affect the relationship between a baby and its parents, she got a mixed reply. At 37% (n=10) childcare managers said **no**, the relationship is not affected, while 33% (n=9) gave an answer other than a straight yes/no. The following is a representative sample of the replies given:

I don't take babies for that reason. I don't approve of parents leaving off a baby. Babies should be one year or 1.5 yrs when they are left in care.

Realistically the child bonds with childminder. Parents who ring a few times a day are riddled with guilt.

I don't do babies, I think for the first 6 months the mother should take time off to take care of her baby.

Babies can bond and become attached to the childminder, and mum and dad get dinner.

An awful lot of them don't take the extended maternity or even the full maternity leave. The baby was sick but they still took baby in here after 2 days.

I never worked with small babies, but it's obvious they'd have better bonding with the childcare worker.

I had a baby from 3 months; the thought of giving my baby to a childminder would kill me. Kids go home and into bed, in bed for 8pm.

There is one man I know who leaves work in the evening so that he is home to spend time with his two children, putting them to bed etc, then he goes back into work until 10pm at night, to catch up.

After a while when they are aged two/two and a half they see more of us than their own father or mother. Their father is gone in the morning and not they're in the evening and they are in bed. At two and a half they want to come back here to the minder at the weekends.

Again, it can be seen that childcare managers are saying that babies can bond more with them as opposed to the parents owing to the babies seeing more of them than their parents and from what the childcare managers are saying here, as the children get older they even want to be back to them again at the weekends as well as full time during the week.

Picking up on the comment by the childcare manager that: 'An awful lot of them don't take the extended maternity or even full maternity leave'; we saw from the literature review in this study that in the UK the arrival of the Government's '*Work and Families Bill*' (2005) has strengthened employment rights for mothers and fathers. Fathers will be entitled to up to three months paid paternity leave if the child's mother returns to work after six months but before her maternity leave is up. The Government aims to increase paid maternity leave again to one year and to introduce the new rights for fathers by 2008 if feasible.

Furthermore, the researcher discovered that it appears to be difficult to get a large private childcare facility to take care of a baby. They said:

'It's too expensive and the ratio is one staff to three babies, we only get around €150 per baby per week and we would need a lot more than that'.

As a result of this most parents opt to get a home childminder to care for babies, however the literature review uncovered similar research from Waldfogel (2005) Kamerman (2005) and Ruhm (1998) who all stated similarly that: 'It is best for parents and children to avail of longer maternity and parental leave'. In addition, Engle (2002) states: 'Policies are also needed that provide women protection against returning to work too soon after giving birth. Maternity protection legislation is woefully inadequate. Whereas 192 countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, only 38 have ratified the International Labour Organization's 1952 Maternity Protection Convention. Even if signed, the latter's provisions apply to only a small proportion of the population'.

It could be argued that if there was a moratorium in Ireland on all women returning to work without taking the full amount of maternity leave allocated to them that this would improve the quality of life for them and their children. Furthermore, the results of this could be studied and compared to the existing situation so as to determine the effects of full day care for babies and children.

But, in the present situation, the researcher was eager to know if parents are happy to leave their child/children in full day care?

#### **5.14.4 ARE PARENTS HAPPY TO LEAVE THEIR CHILD/CHILDREN IN FULL DAY CARE?**

The researcher was told by 96.3% (n=26) childcare managers out of 27 that parents were happy to leave their child/children in full day: 'Parents were happy to leave the children even though in some cases they had no choice but to do so'. This statistic of 26 childcare managers saying that parents are happy to leave their children with them for more than 3.5 hours per day corresponds with data from the working parents questionnaires showing that as well as 90.5% (n= 294) of parents stating that their child was in care for more than 3.5 hours per day, also, (79.4% - n=258) said that their child will remain in care for more than 3 years.

In contrast to this, Wallerstein (2000: 282-294) in the chapter discussing the psychological effects of divorce on children in her book '*Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*' said: 'Confusion and guilt because both parents were working is to blame for the problems, even 'amicable' or 'good divorces' cause psychological injury that lasts for many years'. However, there can be advantages and disadvantages to full day care for children. With this in mind the researcher presented the childcare managers with a list detailing the advantages/disadvantages of good quality childcare, starting with the advantages below:

#### **5.15 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF FULL DAY CARE**

The advantages were as follows:

- Being in-group care is good for a child's stamina and stability
- Children develop socially and form relationships early
- Emotions are developed and with tuition are understood.
- You notice improvement in cognitive ability
- Children learn to be assertive earlier
- Children are taught routine and challenging behaviour is easier to control.

All twenty seven (27) childcare providers agreed with these advantages.

Moreover, they listed some more advantages that they felt that they are providing:

We are providing a supporting role, especially to new families/families from other countries because there is absolutely no support system for parents outside their families, the childcare facility has become their main form of support

We do everything for the children; we notice all the new milestones but we just hint at it for the parents, for example, if we saw a child taking their first steps we wouldn't tell the parents, we would say he/she might walk very soon.

By providing all the things, for example, from birthday parties to extra curricular activities etc, etc, we are doing the parents a favour; it leaves them more time for themselves and their children are enjoying/benefiting from them as well.

Children like routine, I know if we were open at weekend they would want to come in and the parents would be delighted and take them in...

Who else would do what we do, from 7.00am to 7pm each day, every week, we are open 52 weeks and for so little pay, I know many of the parents would not do it.

Childcare managers were happy with the level of care that they were providing as only 4 i.e. 14.8% out of 27 reported having received complaints from parents.

Childcare managers are saying that they are in a supporting role and sometimes the only support for new working parents, while at the same time they say that no one, not even the parents themselves would do the work that they do for the children.

All 27 childcare managers agreed that children benefit from socialising and integrating with children who have special needs and children who come from different countries, commenting that: 'Yes it's good to give them a good understanding that every child is different – good for when they grow up to see different cultures'. Furthermore, 88.9% (n=24) of childcare managers felt that they were providing a good service and enhancing their communities by doing so. One childcare manager made the following comment: 'We take on the whole family, in some cases we're the only family they have, for example, young couples are moving away from their families or/and we have families from other countries and they have no bonds here except for us.' While this survey was conducted in and around Sligo towns and Letterkenny the same problems are prevalent in larger town and cities. Owing to these changes, young working parents have to travel long distances both in the morning and evening in order to go to work. This was evidenced in research from Clinch *et al* (2007) when conducting the survey '*Understanding and Enhancing Quality of Life in Ireland*', they found that: 'Dubliners are "significantly less happy" because of traffic and the associated stresses of congestion'. But, what if any are the disadvantages of full day care for children? The researcher presented the childcare managers with the following possible disadvantages of group care:

- There are too many children to care for them properly

- There is not enough qualified staff to care for the children
- It is difficult to give individual time to children
- Sometimes children can develop collective bad behaviour
- It can be difficult to keep every child happy.

All childcare managers agreed that there could be a potential to encounter the list of disadvantages above but due to Health Service Executive (HSE) ratio regulations and fully qualified staff and courses about challenging behaviour, all disadvantages were being addressed in a professional way. In addition, the childcare managers listed other disadvantages, for example, two thirds i.e. 18 childcare managers said: 'The child/children do not ask for their parents during the day'.

Other comments included the following:

Parents want more and more for less. Here we do the birthday parties, taking them to Irish dancing, horse riding, music, the lot...

It's gone more like America here, every day.

If children are sick the parents still want to take them in to us, they won't take time off to be with them. If they do get a day or a half-day off work, it's for themselves, they would go to the hairdresser or pamper themselves or whatever, and the child still stays here.

Parents have tears in their eyes when leaving the child here if it's sick.

I have concerns for children because they are left here for long hours, for example, from 7.00am-6pm, it's too long.

Parents feel guilty but it's the way it's gone now, the economy, mortgages etc.

Parents need education and they need it now. A woman said to me:

'Do you know this; it costs me more to have this child minded here with you than it does to pay our mortgage'.

Not too many women now who will go to university and give it all up when they need childcare. When you get your degree, you hold onto it and you get a job, its costing €320,000 of a three-bed semi-d now.

I think that parents are missing out on so much. If you have a career and you choose it's not too bad but I think if you have no choice but to go to work and leave your child in full time care, it's very hard.

I see them moving children from one place to the next, then running and rushing in the morning, and again at it in the evening, it's a Rat race.

In relation to the comment from a parent: 'it costs me more to have this child minded here with you than it does to pay our mortgage', it is clear from the childcare managers that they are dealing with guilty stressed out parents having to hand over

their children for long hours (perhaps up to 11 per day) to the childcare facilities and they are expecting the childcare facilities to do everything for their children and yet parents do not want to pay or value this professional work done by childcare providers.

Furthermore in replying to the comment: 'I see them moving children from one place to the next, then running and rushing in the morning, and again at it in the evening, it's a Rat race', it could be argued that because of all the running and rushing and being moved around, these children may have problems later on with attachments. Also they may find it difficult to establish a secure base. As stated earlier, Bowlby (1982) would be advocating good attachments for the child and Winnicott (1986) would be stressing the importance of a secure base for the developing child. In addition, there is evidence that high quality early childhood education and care can complement the home and strengthen the sense of belonging children have across both settings. A programme such as 'Growing Child' offered by *Lifestart* in Sligo among others is a good programme to enhance all these qualities.

To counteract this, home childminders told the researcher that they were always trying to replicate a home from home atmosphere for the children in their care. They felt that they were providing a small, intimate and professional service to parents. Most of their services were established through word of mouth and most were not able to cope with the amount of enquires that they kept receiving from working parents, especially to care for babies. Home childminders made these comments:

All my friends try to get as much time off work with the baby but I have pregnant women ringing to see if I could mind a baby once they know they are pregnant. From the amount of enquires I get, especially for babies – I got taken off the HB list because I was getting too many calls.

There is only a few registered childminders; you need to do a lot of looking when you want to get one. If you register, they want you to have baby-changing areas in the bathroom, have guards around this and that e.g. lights covered over.

In the bigger childcare facilities, siblings could be separated, we have them all together here.

We are nice and small, no structured schedules, here we let them have a rest and take it at their own pace.

They model my older children; we become their extended family...

However, anecdotal evidence suggests that when childcare managers and childminders have their own babies they take time off and they do not resort to leaving them in full day care like the children whom they are now taking care of for long hours.

The researcher wanted to know if some parents wanted childcare managers to do extra things for their child/children. More than half of the childcare managers i.e. 59.3% (n=16) replied **yes** to this question and one manager cited the following comment: ‘they would want us to clap, pamper and fuss over their child every time...’ Another question posed was, do the children ask about their parents during the day while they are at the crèche? Equally 59.3% (n=16) answered **no**, the children do not ask about the parents. Moreover childcare managers made the following comments on this question:

Very seldom they ask, unless they are sick.

The children kick up and do not want to go home when they see the parents, they continue playing, it’s like they resent being left all day by the parents.

One private childcare provider commented: ‘The children want to come in on Saturdays and Sundays, especially for stories, as the parents don’t have any time to do this with them in the evenings’. From this comment it seems that children are developing greater bonds with the childminder than the parents; so what does this say for future children or for the thoughts of the present children who are experiencing these emotions.

#### **5.16 WOULD YOU LEAVE YOUR CHILD IN FULL DAY CARE FOR 3.5 HOURS OR MORE PER DAY**

Giving that some childcare managers taking part in the survey were either parents themselves or about to become a parent soon, the researcher asked them the following final question: Would you leave your child in full day care for more than three point five (3.5) hours per day?

Twenty-five i.e. 92.6% (N=25) out of 27 respondents replied **no** to this question. This reply is in direct contrast to the answer to question eleven where childcare providers were asked if parents were happy to leave their child/children in full day care for



more than 3.5 hours. For this question 26 i.e. (96.3%) of childcare providers out of 27 said parents were more than happy to leave their child/children in full day care with them. There is a considerable difference in these two statistics and it begs the question, why are the childcare providers not happy to leave their own child/children in full day care for more than 3.5 hours per day for 5 days per week, like the parents who are happy to leave their children to be cared for by them? However, economics are determining that parents will have to continue to work. As in the literature review which indicated that:

Women will be enticed into returning to the workforce and according to the National Skills strategy report (2007); a million more workers are needed to keep the Irish economy competitive

It is indiscriminate of the government to be encouraging women into the workforce without providing parallel childcare policies to enhance and promote quality of life and it will remain the priority of every government in the future to address the needs and recognise the efforts of working parents because as Crittenden (2007) states: 'The most important job, even economists agree, is raising the next generation'.

### **5.17 CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW DISCUSSION**

There were many varied answers given in replies from the twenty-seven childcare managers. It is evident that childcare managers and their staff are providing a good service to parents. They work long hours and are paid very low wages. The researcher was made aware that all the childcare managers she met were dedicated to making a difference to the lives of the children in whom they were entrusted to care for, in some cases for many years.

They comment on how parents were more than happy to leave the children with them, however it was a contrast to find that most (25) child care managers themselves would not leave their child/children in full day care for long hours.

Questions, which were not analysed in detail, could offer further insights but time did not allow in this present study. However, the discussion on the questionnaires and the interviews were based around the following themes, which were reflected, by a variety of perspectives, similarities and contrasts:

- The effects of recent changes in society on the lives of families, in relation to the provision of full day care for young children.
- What are the effects on the quality of lives of families when parents of young children are in the labour force, thus requiring provision of full day care for young children?
- Effects of full day care on children
- Are the effects of full day childcare positive or negative for children?

After discussing the questionnaires and the interviews we can draw the following conclusions: it is obvious from the questionnaires that working parents of whom most were dual earners were working for 10 years or more; they are stressed and feel guilty leaving their child/children in the childcare facilities. They seem to be rushing and racing every day and everywhere and are unable to take time off, not even when their child/children are sick. They say that economics are determining that they go to work to pay the mortgage and provide a quality of life for themselves and their families. Furthermore, as a result of the downturn in the present economy and with inflation going up, coupled with fees for services as well as basic food stuffs all going up, working parents including dual earners will have to keep working for the foreseeable future.

The childcare managers are asserting that they are providing a very good professional childcare service to parents. However, they feel their work is undervalued and they are not getting enough money for the services that they provide. To back this up they list the services that they provide and for such little pay. They appear to be taking on the role of parent, teacher, nurse, social worker, and psychologist among other services to the child/children. Childcare managers are saying here that parents appear to be guilty when dropping off their child/children to them. In addition, parents expect the childcare managers to be doing everything with the child/children and in many cases this saves the parents from doing it in the evenings or at weekends. However, while childcare managers are doing all this, the parents are unwilling to pay for it. On the other hand the childcare managers prefer to get the child as young as possible so they can mould them into their routines and structures.

Some studies show that good quality childcare is good for children and especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, however other studies show that the stress hormone cortisol could be raised when children are in group situations, for example in childcare facilities for long hours. Also there could be increases in agitated/aggressive behaviours from spending long hours in the childcare facilities; now with children returning to the childcare facility for after school care it means that children are in these places from when they are a few months old until they reach 12/13 years and move on to primary school.

In summary, it appears to be a catch 22 situation because it seems parents have to go to work and childcare managers will run childcare facilities to accommodate the needs of the working parents. It will remain to be seen if the government will make any new changes to enhance the quality of life for working parents and for the childcare profession in Ireland.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.0 INTRODUCTION**

This study examined the question: ‘Does the provision of full day care improve the quality of life for children and their families? Themes were examined and explored under the four headings below:

- Quality of Life
  - What are the tangible changes on the quality of lives for families when parents of young children are in the labour force, thus requiring provision of full day care for young children?
- Quality Provision
  - What are the tangible measures taken in Ireland in relation to quality provision in early childhood care and education?
- Attachment
  - What can be observed with regard to attachment for children when they are in childcare because their parents are in the workforce?
- Childcare Issues
  - In relation to the provision of full day care for young children, what is viewed as best practice by researchers, parents and childcare managers?

#### **6.1 CONCLUSIONS**

- a. Quality of Life: What are the tangible changes on the quality of lives for families when parents of young children are in the labour force, thus requiring provision of full day care for young children?

As is well known, Ireland has changed utterly over the past five to ten years. There have been many changes in society, some good and some not so good, for example there are more people suffering from addictions, more crimes, and suicides. More demands from society and from the government are being placed on parents, especially women in relation to fuelling the economic boom, thus more women are

returning to the workforce (60.8%) at present but in line with the EU trends this is expected to rise in the future (CSO 2007a QNHS: Quarter 1).

The commuter belt parents are the young people who rise at 6 am to wake their sleeping children to drive them to expensive childcare facilities and in the evening collect them to drive home quite late. They commute to their place of work, mostly by car, which could be a two-hour drive, and home again, in under another 2 hours if they are lucky. These parents would have bought houses which were cheaper in the commuter towns than in the larger cities.

The picture in the current study in the North West is not quite so stark, but the same elements are there of rushing, working, putting children into childcare facilities and having difficulty reconciling the quality of life issues with practical demands such as mortgages and time spent in childcare.

Most participants in the study were females aged 25-35 who have completed a third level education. While the government are encouraging women into the labour market, they are not providing for family life. There would need to be a dedicated approach to address this inequality. It is clear that women are making the most changes and the effects of these changes are showing because there was a large number of respondents 235 out of 325 who said they were suffering from stress.

- b. Quality Provision: What are the tangible measures taken in Ireland in relation to quality provision in early childhood care and education?

Childcare provision has improved greatly in Ireland over the past five to ten years. This is made possible by the government introducing funding and the promise to increase childcare places up to 50,000 by 2010. Also much valuable research has been conducted by CECDE among others which culminated in the launching of Siolta in 2006. All the research and theory perspectives about early childhood education and care that has been conducted will be instrumental in implementing new government policy in childcare for the future. Several studies depicted the value of good quality childcare while longitudinal studies have showed that good quality childcare has benefits which can last throughout the lives of the people who were part of the

research, for example the Perry High/Scope research in the US as well as the EPPE study in the UK.

c. Attachment

What can be observed with regard to attachment for children when they are in childcare because their parents are in the workforce?

Under attachment, among others, the effects of full day care on children was explored. The literature review demonstrated, using data from several studies that children are affected by being in childcare for long hours, for example there is evidence that children can suffer from separation anxiety and stress and their behaviour can become aggressive. Furthermore, in chapter two section 2.4.5: 95 studies were discussed showing the rise in cortisol in response to the stress of full day care. Therefore we have stressed parents and stressed children, just in the ordinary daily life events. In this study, parents were able to articulate their feelings at being separated from their children, which included guilt at leaving them and envy that the paid workers were enjoying their children's childhood. Children however, cannot usually express their feeling so clearly except through their behaviour. The scope of this study could not examine the long-term effects of such separation and childcare arrangements, but this in itself would merit close examination.

The childcare managers gave a good overview of their services. Some offered more services than others, for example food included and opening at 6.45am until 6pm. Costs varied, however, most facilities were charging between €120-150 per week, per child. They aimed to and wanted to provide a good service to the parents and the children. They had pride in their work, and endeavoured to give the best quality care to the children. However, it was evident in their voices that they felt their work was underpaid and undervalued. A particularly insightful comment was that they would not leave their own baby/child in full day care. Childcare providers who had grown up children were thankful that in their jobs they cared for their own children without having to resort to outside childcare. Furthermore, there is anecdotal evidence showing that when the current childcare managers/workers have their own babies they take full time off and in resuming work they do less hours in order to be with their child/children more.

In contrast to this, as stated by the childcare managers, working parents were more than happy to leave their children in full day care. There is an apparent ambivalence seen in the questionnaires where the parents clearly stated that they wished they had more time with their children, and yet had to work to pay the bills but their public façade presented to the childcare managers was that they wanted to leave their children. One wonders how this is interpreted by the children. Perhaps the parents were endeavouring not to show any distress in front of the children.

It is clear from this study that mothers are returning to work shortly after their babies are born; most are not taking extended maternity benefit. Childcare managers would say that owing to economic pressures, parents cannot afford to be at home and do not ask for extra leave from their place of employment as this raises further issues for them. Meeting childcare and mortgage costs was a major issue for parents as 96.9% (n=315) of them said the government was not doing enough to support them while 86.8% (n=283) of parents said there should be a system of tax credits on childcare costs for working parents allowing them to work less and spend more time with their child/children. The level of training of staff was shown to be an important factor in parents choosing a childcare facility. Trained staff require appropriate pay, and this is expensive.

#### d. Childcare Issues

In relation to the provision of full day care for young children, what is viewed as best practice by researchers, parents and childcare managers?

This theme explored among others whether the effects of full day childcare were positive or negative for children? It was difficult to make a definitive conclusion about these effects for children in this study, as they were not directly studied. Parents were asked if they were happy with the quality of life for them, their children and their family, Seventy four point two percent 74.2% (n=241) of them answered yes to this question. A respondent said: 'I am happy with the quality of life that I have. I think that women feel guilty no matter what they do – go to work – stay at home'.

From this study it appears that parents have to juggle everything every day, in many cases the only help they get is from the childcare facility. They realise that this is how it is if they are to live and survive. In the survey I gave the working parents 8 choices



of what they felt improved quality of life for them and their families. The top three most important were:

1. Being healthy 98.8% (n=320)
2. Having dinner together at weekends 53.8% (n=175)
3. Taking part in Children's activities 52.0% (n=169) while only 28.3% (n= 92) listed visiting grand parents as important. This gives a snapshot of what parents value most and provides food for thought.

While the economy has provided the opportunity for employment and especially for women, the government have not addressed policy issues in order to support parents/families when women return to work.

## **6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a. My primary recommendation would be to appeal to the government to address the important issue of childcare in Ireland.

A State funded integrated childcare policy is needed. This could be done by the government implementing affordable childcare for all parents by introducing tax relief and tax credits and by including those who are caring for their children at home and those who are receiving low incomes. Annual funding should be provided to all childcare facilities on a sliding scale especially to facilities in low socio-economic areas, for community-based down to private facilities which could be opened to social welfare recipients also. More facilities could be available if empty rooms in primary schools were used for childcare and after school services. Anecdotal evidence suggests that at the moment in some parts of Ireland, especially in the cities churches are closed and these could be also be used.

In addition, childcare should be recognised as a valuable profession. This could be achieved by all childcare workers taking a degree in childcare/childhood studies, which includes placement training before commencing work in a childcare facility. Likewise childcare wages should be increased in line with other professional careers. Extra emphasis should be placed on home childminders by valuing their contribution to childcare in

Ireland and by encouraging them to register their businesses as this would give more choice to parents seeking childcare.

- b. While the economy has provided the opportunity for employment and especially for women, the government have not addressed policy issues in order to support parents/families when women return to work e.g. through improved taxation arrangements or grants to cover childcare, or to allow a realistic choice for a parent to stay at home. This needs to be considered urgently. Looking at the bigger picture, to achieve social policy changes representatives of the various political parties could be lobbied, to ask questions about present and future policy stances regarding quality of family life. Issues that could be further discussed by the government could be for example, re-addressing rural resettlement with ongoing supports for the people who relocate. However as we see from the current study, the North West, which could be viewed as an example of a rural haven, is not completely idyllic.
- c. Having carried out this study; my view is that there should be special tax/grant arrangements built into employment law where employers give due considerations to all women who wish to have a child and return to work by allowing them to have full pay for one year with the opportunity to work from home, flexitime or work for a few hours until their child is ready for primary school. Included in this should be a clause that their career paths/promotion should not be disrupted or put on hold. While this would prove very expensive for the government and ultimately the taxpayer, it may well be a good investment in our future society, similar to that shown by the High Scope study which demonstrated a seventeen-fold return on the investment in early childhood education program, primarily because of the large continuing effect on the reduction of male crime (Clothier and Poppe, 2004).

Evidence from the literature review by Belsky (2005) indicates that placing children under two in an average non-maternal care facility for long hours does seem to be associated with some (modest) developmental risk, especially with respect to the mother-child relationship, problem behaviour, and social

competence and academic work habits, and such outcomes are not merely by-products of low-quality child care. Therefore, parents should have a choice if they wish to return to work after having their child and not be led by the economic climate of the day. Parents could be encouraged to remain at home, by longer parental leave policies and ideally a realistic allowance could be paid by the Government to stay-at-home parents.

While increased levels of cortisol were seen in children who were in full day care at a childcare centre (Watanura, *et al*, 2003), many studies in the literature review showed that there are numerous benefits for children who attend pre-school. This is especially the case for children from low socio economic backgrounds where resources are provided for them to attend pre-school as was depicted by Loeb *et al* (2005) and also from the *High/Scope Perry Preschool Study* (2008). Ultimately, while socio-economic group was not requested in this current study, economics determined that parents went to work because 90% of dual earner families took part in the study.

- c. I would strongly advise that employers should endorse family friendly work practices in places of employment; for example, options to work flexi-time/part-time should be made available in every employment facility that is employing a large number of working parents. Moreover, working parents should have the right to work part-time only. I think that it should be mandatory also to have a crèche/childcare facility on site of large companies where there are so many working parents.
- d. Following such rapid social change as we have experienced in recent years, we need a national debate on the importance of early years. This could be effectively done via television or radio. A start has been made by the RTE programmes presented by psychologist David Coleman. Broader issues require political debate such as the need for review of Government policies on parental leave, and the ‘investment’ needed in the future generation.
- e. Another recommendation I have would be to help parents to stay at home with their child/children until they start school. I think that a system like the current

home helps for the older people should be employed for working parents for the four/five years to help the parents in their homes. Parents could work flexi-hours; from home or part-time if this was in place. In this way the child and the parents would be mostly in their own homes in those crucial developmental years for the child. This would mean less stress on parents and children as well as providing consistency and stability for the child. Qualified childcare care workers could be employed but subsidised by the government to liaise with parents and to be available to go to the parents' homes when and if needed. Qualified workers could have a base, for example, a childcare facility near the children's home and it could be arranged that they take the children to this facility for a few hours every day. In this way the children will be socialising and integrating with their own age groups and learning new experiences, it would be like having the best of both worlds.

Some mature people could be looking for a change of career/life pattern; if they were encouraged to consider it as an option they may appreciate being asked and needed by young working mothers to care for their children in a homely setting, which would be in the neighbourhood of where the children are and will be living. As well as this their wisdom and understanding would be valued, for example, by young mothers who for economic reasons have had to move away from their own immediate family to buy a house in this area. These women and their partners could offer those children a whole new life instead of spending long hours in a childcare setting and it would be a two fold experience as they may enjoy the challenge of a new lifestyle. This is another potential role for County Childcare Committees to seek out and encourage such mature people.

- f. Other ideas in supporting parents include the following:
- As preparation for parenting, a module could be initially implemented as part of the Home Economics syllabus for the Leaving Certificate State Examinations or for CSPE at Junior Certificate, with follow on courses

available to the general public by the HSE and the County Childcare Committees throughout each county.

- More parenting courses need to be available and easily accessible to the general public at times when parents can attend. This may have the added benefit of parents appreciating the work of childminders and being willing to pay for the excellent service.
- It could be worthwhile if there were information sessions and information booklets available to expectant/intending parents in order to highlight the importance of their decisions regarding childcare.

All these measures would enhance the quality of life for children, parents and families, alleviating the current stress and pressure from their lives, which is evidently present in this study.

Undertaking this study has made me more aware of the serious gaps in social policy provision in Ireland for families both from the government and employers' point of view. Much more is required apart from promises to provide one year's free preschool to children. The evidence shows that the money needs to be spent at the pre-school stage; likewise parents need support at this stage. After all, the children of today will be the adults of tomorrow. It can be argued that the childcare situation has reached crazy altitudes whereby parents are pressurised into working (mostly fulltime) because the government wants to fuel its economic boom, but at what cost? Working parents are under immense pressure to work in order to pay the mortgage and sustain a modest lifestyle for themselves and their families, but is it improving their quality of life overall?

It could be argued that the whole childcare issue has imploded on us by surprise over the past few years since the advent of the Celtic Tiger. In the next 10 to 15 years the effects of these changes/pressures on families will become apparent. Precautionary steps need to be taken now by the government; for example by enabling and encouraging parents in Ireland to make informed decisions regarding childcare by being able to examine and review annual reports regarding childcare both from national and regional sources. This would allow for transparency, accountability and choice while allowing parents to choose a suitable childcare facility for their child,

should that be their decision to do so. These reports would be most helpful to the many young families who/have moved out to hinterland towns away from their immediate families, coupled with the fact that foreign parents too with children are coming to settle in Ireland without the benefit of extended family network.

Resources and research are needed now. Already, we see the mistakes of building housing estates without adequate pre-planning twenty years ago. The result is that some are now concrete ghettos of social deprivation. Similarly, if we do not address this crucial childcare/family friendly work practice issue at the early stage, we could suffer the consequences.

It could be argued that we are on the cusp of a sociological explosion; the start of it can be seen today because for example, there appears to be more than one murder every day in Ireland now as well as the many other social problems in society. Working parents need to unite and demand rights, as always people have the power, the power to change the thinking of the few, mainly the men who are in government. Childcare issues appear to mainly affect women as instanced by this current study, despite much publicity about fathers' roles in families. The Government clearly has a role here and with only 12% of women occupying Dáil seats, there is a lot of work to do.

### **6.3 FURTHER RESEARCH NEEDS**

This study has been confined to childcare facilities in and around Sligo and 2 facilities in Letterkenny, Co Donegal. Because I am not aware of any other study to date in Ireland on this particular topic, there is a need for more research and more study to be done.

Gaps in the current study include consultation with the children. Through play children could be studied across a spectrum including those who are/have experienced full day care, children who have never been in full day care and children who are in part-time care in order to access their views and get their feelings on their situations. It would be beneficial to have access to research these children and to hear their voices on how they feel about spending long hours in childcare. This study could be similar to the study by Hayes and Bradley (2008:54): *Accessing and hearing their*

*voices: Contributing to the debate on participatory research with children and young people in Ireland –The experiences of the Ballymun needs analysis study.*

In this study, parents were asked if their child/children were in care for less than or more than 3.5 hours per day; 9.5% said less while 90.5% said their child was in care for more than 3.5 hours per day. More exact information about length of time spent in childcare could be elicited in a future study together with information about stress indicators in these children. Furthermore, factors related to childcare and social class could be studied and compared in a further study.

Comparative study of families where parents work part time or full time could yield interesting data. Comparative research in Ireland on a larger scale, looking at outcomes from other childcare facilities and other geographical areas would be useful in determining what changes if any are apparent to this study.

Arrangements for work in other European countries could be studied, for example, Italy appears to have a shorter working day of 6 hours but a longer week, including Saturdays; this arrangement seems to suit the dual career parents, where different shifts can be worked. For example, Giaccone, (2005:9) emphasises ZF Padova, the Italian plant of the German group ZF, which employs approximately 400 blue - and white-collar workers. The company has introduced a new time planning system, which gives the employees greater control over their working hours.

An extension of this study could be to examine the external influences on quality of life and childcare, such as employment law, taxation, and even transport and urban planning, since these all affect working families and therefore their children.

It would be beneficial to examine the situation regarding solo working parents and childcare arrangements. While some solo parents did take part in the survey for working parents in this study, most of the parents were dual earners.

A further aspect to study would be the views of fathers in order to gain a first hand account of what it is like in those households where there are dual earners and young children.



Another aspect that could be explored would be to interview same sex parents, feminists and men who are campaigning for equal parental rights, for example, John Waters.

Examples of areas for further study on quality of life and childcare include the following:

- Examination of roles taken within the family in modern Ireland
- Stressful aspects of family life
- Rewarding aspects of family life
- Examination of sharing of household and childrearing tasks
- Assessment of satisfaction or otherwise with current demands of work on family life

Likewise child psychologists, teachers, Social Workers, Social Care Workers and Family Resource Centre staff could be interviewed to ascertain their views on the effects of full day care on children in West of Ireland/Provincial Ireland or Ireland in general.

There is plenty material for several studies once the questions are further refined. These investigations could prove useful for many local and national agencies in order to assess, plan and implement change for betterment for the children, parents and families of the future.

I would like to conclude by thanking all those who contributed to this study.

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# APPENDICES

**APPENDIX: 1 Literature Review (sample of references by discipline)**

<u>Psychology</u>	<u>Childcare</u> <u>Family Support</u> <u>Quality of Life</u>	<u>Economics</u>	<u>Philosophy</u>	<u>Statistics</u>	<u>Sociology</u>
Bowlby (1944, 82, 88 & 1989)	ECOP Clinch (2006) (2007)	Williams (2006)	Belsky, Howes & Owen (2003)	CSO Ireland	Kennedy (2001)
Winnicott (1986)	UNICEF (2007)	OECD (2006)	Ahnert & Lamb (2004)	Europe Eurostat	Marquardt (2005)
Ainsworth (1970's)	Featherstone (2004) Gornick &	IBEC/ICTU (2005)	Fitzpatrick (2007)	EBS/KM Index (2007)	Wallerstein (2000)
Lero (2003)	Meyers (2004) Goelman (2004)	Callan (2006)	Belsky (2005)		Barry (2007)
Dipietro (2003)	Crompton (1990)	O' Connor (2007)	Nomaguchi (2006)		Cameron (2007)
Catherwood & Gillibrand (2004)	Finlay (2005, 2007)	Richardson (1997)	Waldfoegel (2005)		Hansen (2004)
Berger (2001)	Moore EPPE (1996) (2005)	Crittenden (2001 & 07)	Loeb (2004 & 05)		Perel (2007)
Fahlberg (2004)	Aubry & Dahl (2006)		Biddulph (2006)		Daly (2007)
Hughes (2007)	Purcell (2006)		Webster- Stratton (2005)		
Sroufe (2008)	Byrne David (2007) (1994)		Gilbert Sylva (2003) (2003)		
Goldberg (2000 & 2008).	Emmott Buckley (2007) (2007)		Peisner- feinberg (2004)		
Bremner (1997)	Whitbread (2003) Hayes Henry (1993) (1996)		Ruhm (2002 & 98)		
Beaver (2002)	Melhuish & Moss (1991)		McCarthy (2004)		

**APPENDIX: 2**

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CHILDCARE  
WORKERS**

**1. Is this a public/private childcare facility**  yes  No

**2. What time do you open in the morning?**

- Before 7am
- Before 8 am
- After 8 am

**3. What time does the first child arrive?**

- 7 am
- 8 am
- 9 am

**4 How many children do you care for here?**

- Actual number

**5 What age would a child usually be when you receive them?**

- Less than 4 months
- Less than 6 months
- Less than 12 months

**6 How many children are here for more than 3.5 hours per day?**

- Actual number

**7. What time is the last child collected at?**

- After 5 pm
- After 6 pm

**8. In your opinion does the age that the child enters childcare influence their development?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**9. In your opinion do you think a child will under achieve if they do not attend a childcare facility?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**10 What's your opinion on children being in non-parental care?**

- Yes
- No
- Comment?

**11 .In your opinion, are parents happy to leave their child/children for more than 3.5 hours?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**12.Does full day care affect the relationship between a baby and her/his parents?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**13.In your opinion, what are the advantages of good quality childcare?**

Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers here

- Being in-group care is good for a child's stamina and stability
- Children develop socially and form relationships early
- Emotions are developed and with tuition are understood
- You notice improvement in cognitive ability
- Children learn to be assertive
- Children are taught routine and chall behav is easier to control

**14. In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of group child care?**

Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers here

- There are too many children to care for them properly
- There is not enough qualified staff to care for the children
- It is difficult to give individual time to children
- Sometimes children can develop collective bad behaviour
- It can be difficult to keep every child happy

**15. How much does it cost per hour per child?**

More than €5  
Less than €4

**Or is it a fee for the week?**

Yes  
No

**Does this include food?**

Yes

No

**16. How many staff are working here?**

More than 20  
Less than 15  
10  
Less than 10

**17. How much per hour are staff paid?**

**18. How many are qualified?**

All  
Some  
Don't know

**19. What qualifications do you have in the staff?**

Degree in childcare  
Degree in Social Care  
Managers course  
FETAC level 5  
FETAC level 6  
FAS worker  
Community employment worker  
montessori

**20. In your opinion, does childcare staff need training/qualifications?**

Yes  
No  
Don't know

**21. Would you notice a difference between the qualified and unqualified staff?**

**22. How many years of on the job training do you have?**

More than 5

Less than 5

4

Less than 3

None

**23. Do you provide any other services, e.g.?**

Delivering to and collecting child/children

Breakfast Club

After-school club

Hot meals

Holiday Child care

**24. How many parents/ children avail of the e.g.**

Breakfast club

After school club

Holiday Club

Hot meals

**25. Do you think the govt. should provide more funding for opening more public childcare facilities?**

**26. Do you receive assistance from the government?**

**27. What's your opinion on childcare fees?**

**28. What would be an adequate amount for you to be paid for providing childcare services?**

**29. Why do you think the wages are so low for childcare workers?**

**30. Do you think that there is more demand for public childcare as opposed to private childcare facilities?**

**32. What do you think of the recent survey by IrishJobs.ie that 55% of parents were not happy with childcare?**



**33. Why do you think parents choose your facility over other facilities?**

- Highly trained staff
- Affordable
- Friendly
- Facility for special needs
- Accessibility
- Long opening
- Offering more services

- 34. Has the €1,000 grant made a difference to parents**    yes                       No?      
 e.g. more children attending  
 Parents paying for extra e.g. music/drama  
 Attending for more hours  
 Paying for holiday childcare  
 After school club

**35. What would make your service better/?**

- More grants
- More child courses for staff
- Managing difficult behaviour
- Health and safety courses

**36. Do you feel that you play an important role in community development in Sligo?**

**37. Do you get any complaints from parents?**

**38. Would some parents want more than others?**

**39. From your observations, does the child react when they meet/see the parents in the evening?**

- 40. Do they ask for the parent during the day**    Yes                       No

**41. Is there work done with the child e.g. telling them Mummy and Daddy are at work and this is why you are here?**

- 42. Do you find that the other children try/want to bully the child with special needs or from another country.**                      Yes                       No

**43. Would you find that its good for the other children to experience a child with special needs/from another country e.g. would this help them to be more aware and understand children with special needs when they go to primary school?**

*Thank you very much for your time and co-operation.*



No

If Yes –

Why: Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers

- You're happier to leave your child with this person
- Your child is familiar with this person
- You feel your child is getting better care and attention
- Your child may pick up colds/infections in a childcare facility
- The childminder's home is on your route to work

**9. Is your child being cared for in a childcare facility?**

No

If Yes –

Why: Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers

- You prefer your child to be where there are lots of children
- The staff are fully trained and qualified to care for children
- You think group care is better for your child's development
- Your child is open to a wide range of learning facilities
- The childcare facility is on your route to work

**10. Ages of children at start of childcare**

- Less than 6 months
- Less than 12 months
- more than 12 months

**11. What time do you leave your house with your child?**

- Before 7am
- Before 8am
- Before 9am

**12. What time do you arrive home from work?**

- After 6 pm
- After 7 pm
- Other

**13. How many hours per day is your child in care?**

- Less than 3.5
- More than 3.5
- Other

**14. How long will your child remain in childcare?**

- More than 3 years
- less than 2 years

Other

15. Will your child be brought to school from the place of care?

Yes  
No

16. If in a childcare facility will your child attend the facility for after-school?

Yes  
No

17. Are you happy with the level of care provided?

Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers

Very satisfied  
Satisfied  
Some aspects could be better  
It's the best you can afford  
There is nothing else near you

18. Does this company offer child-friendly work arrangements?

Yes  
No  
Don't know

19. Is flexi-time offered?

Yes  
No  
Don't know

20. What about part-time hours? Would this appeal to you?

Yes  
No

21. Does this employer offer career breaks?

Yes  
No  
Don't know

22. Would you consider a career break?

Yes  
No

23. Can you afford to take a career break?

Yes  
No

**24. In your opinion, what are the advantages of working?**

Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers

- You could not see yourself as a fulltime parent
- Having your own money
- Meeting friends
- Getting out of the house
- Able to pay the mortgage
- Able to pay the car loan
- Economics has determined that you remain working?

**25. In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of working?**

Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers

- You don't spend long enough with your baby/child
- You are gone for a whole day
- You are missing out on your child growing up
- It takes you between 1 and 2 hours commuting every day
- You're not there when you child comes home from school
- Housework gets left behind
- You have no time for home baking or cooking

**26. Do you think full day care (more than 3.5 hours) is good for a child?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**27. How would you measure quality of life for your child?**

Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers

- Being healthy
- Having siblings
- Mixing with other children
- Going to childcare facility every day
- Able to buy your child new clothes regularly
- Getting a good primary education
- Able to afford extra curricular activities for your child
- Our child having a good circle of friends
- Going to Secondary School
- Going to College

**28. How would you measure quality of life for your family?**

Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers

- Being healthy
- Having dinner together every day
- Having dinner together at weekends
- Going on family outings
- Going on family holidays e.g. Sun holidays
- Taking part in children's activities e.g. school plays etc

- Visiting grandparents
- Catching up with neighbours
- Being able to afford a fairly new car
- Owning your own house

**29. How would you measure quality of life for yourself?**

Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers

- Having your job, going to work every day
- Able to talk to colleagues
- Meeting friends
- Going to the hairdresser
- Socialising at weekends
- Able to afford foreign holidays
- Shopping for yourself
- Having your own money to spend

**30. What changes would you recommend from the government for working parents?**

Please choose from the list and tick your top 3 answers

- Have a system of tax credits on childcare costs for working parents allowing them to work less and spend more time with their children.
- Subsidise childcare costs and cap private childcare fees
- Government to subsidise free pre-school care provided on a part-time basis
- Make flexibility mandatory in the workplace with Options to work from home
- Increase maternity and paternity leave until the baby is One year old and introduce more parental leave

**31. Is the government doing enough to help working parents?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**32. Do you feel stressed?**

- No

If Yes - Why: Please choose from the list and tick your top 3



When you are off work because your child is sick  
Financial worries  
Under pressure to keep up with others  
Time management  
Not spending enough time with family  
Daily commuting to work is a factor

**33. Are you happy with your quality of life for your child/children, you and your family?**

Yes  
No

*Thank you so much for piloting this questionnaire. I would be most grateful if you could please give your comments about it below.*

## APPENDIX: 4

### **COVER LETTER: QUESTIONNAIRES: PARENTS**

You probably saw the flyers that I left on the tables in the canteen last week informing you about the research and the distribution of the questionnaires for you to complete.

I am a student at the Institute of Technology, Sligo doing a survey about the effects on the quality of life of families when parents of young children are in the labour force, thus requiring provision of 'full day' care for young children. And, are the effects of 'full day' childcare positive or negative for children.

I would like to improve the quality of life for children and their parents in Sligo town.

If you are a parent whose child/children are 6 years of age or under 6 and being cared for informally or formally while you are at work, I would be delighted if you could please take part in the research, your views would be appreciated and valued.

If you wish to ask me any questions about the survey, please feel free to contact me at [S00015603@itsligo.ie](mailto:S00015603@itsligo.ie); or my mobile number: 087 6164708

I would be most grateful if you could please take a few minutes of your time to complete the attached questionnaire. This research project is not sponsored by anybody. It is totally independent. Your name or your place of work will not be identifiable, as I will be using a number coding system when writing up the research. I can assure you that anonymity and confidentiality are of the utmost importance. It will be totally anonymous. Completed questionnaires will be collected by me and stored in a locked cabinet, which can only be accessed by me at the Institute of Technology.

The information gained from this survey may go towards the betterment, future development and implementation of social policies.

Please drop the completed questionnaires into the sealed box provided e.g. by the exit door on the left in the canteen on or before Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> December, I will be collecting the box at 6pm on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

Thank you very much for your co-operation

Maureen O'Hara

## APPENDIX: 5



02 April 2007

A Chára,

I am a student conducting a research study at this Institute. My thesis question is:

*'Does the provision of 'full day' childcare improve the quality of life for children and their families?'*

I have chosen your facility among others because after checking in the Sligo Childcare Directory, I see that you provide full day care for children.

I would be most grateful if you would be so kind as to take part in the study, your views would be greatly appreciated and valued.

I will be asking questions about childcare in relation to the children of working parents whom you are caring for at your childcare facility.

In order to obtain the relevant information from child care facility managers, in conjunction with my supervisor Dr. Margaret Gilmore, we have designed a list of interview questions that I would like to ask you.

You can contact me by email: [s00015603@itsligo.ie](mailto:s00015603@itsligo.ie) or by mobile: 087 6164708 or my supervisor's email: [gilmore.margaret@itsligo.ie](mailto:gilmore.margaret@itsligo.ie) or by phone at 071 91 55326 if you have any queries regarding the research before you decide to take part in it.

Interviews should take about 30 minutes and before each interview I will answer any questions or concerns that you would want to know about the research. Looking forward to hearing from you. I will ring you next week about the interviews.

Kind regards

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Maureen O'Hara

## APPENDIX: 6

INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA, SLIGEACH



20 November 2006

Dear Sir/madam,

I am a student conducting a research study at this Institute. My thesis question is:

*'Does the provision of 'full day' childcare improve the quality of life for children and their families?'*

In this survey I will be asking working parents about their childcare and work arrangements.

I have selected your workplace because of the great employment that you have been giving and still continue to give to so many working parents in Sligo for many years.

In order to obtain the relevant information from parents, in conjunction with my supervisor Dr. Margaret Gilmore, we have designed a questionnaire to be completed by working parents whose children are being cared for in child care facility while they are at work.

I would be most grateful if you would be so kind as to give your permission and cooperation for the duration and completion of the study. From start to finish I hope to have the fieldwork completed in 3 weeks. It is envisaged that, firstly, I could visit your work place and distribute flyers e.g. place them on tables in the canteen informing the participants about the study and asking them to please take part in the research.

Week 1: distribution of flyers to precede questionnaires

Week 2: I would distribute the questionnaires and covering letter

Week 3: I would collect the completed questionnaires.

In the meantime I would be delighted to meet you, at your convenience, if you wish to discuss or if you require further information regarding the survey. My mobile phone number is 087 6164708 or my email: [s00015603@itsligo.ie](mailto:s00015603@itsligo.ie) and my supervisor's phone number is 071 91 55326 or email: [gilmore.margaret@itsligo.ie](mailto:gilmore.margaret@itsligo.ie)

Yours sincerely

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Maureen O'Hara

# Parents . . . . .

Please take part in my research survey.

I am a student conducting a research study at the

Institute of Technology here in Sligo.

My thesis question is:

*'Does the provision of 'full day' childcare improve the quality of life for children and their families?'*

Your supervisor has granted permission to distribute questionnaires, which will be accompanied by a cover letter next week.

If you are a parent whose child/children are 6 years of age or under 6 and being cared in formal or informal childcare, I would be delighted if you could please take part in the survey.

**Thank you very much for your cooperation.**

**Maureen O'Hara**

**APPENDIX: 8a**

**25 February 2007**

**RE: Childcare Survey**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to thank you most sincerely for assisting me with the survey by taking, distributing, supervising and collecting the questionnaires for me. I am most grateful for all your help.

Also I would be much obliged if you could please convey my thanks to the employees who completed and returned the questionnaires. I wish to thank them very much.

Kind regards

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Maureen O'Hara

**APPENDIX: 8b**

**1 May 2007**

**RE: Childcare Survey**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to thank you most sincerely for taking part in the research by agreeing to do the interview with me.

Also I would be most grateful if you could please convey my thanks to all the parents in your childcare facility that took time out to complete and return the questionnaires.

Kind regards

\_\_\_\_\_  
Maureen O'Hara