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Gender, work-life balance and health
amongst women and men in
administrative, manual and technical jobs
in a single organisation: a qualitative
study

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Medical Research Council

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Abstract

There is increasing interest in how people manage the multiple demands of paid work, home and personal life, and the consequences that failure to achieve 'balance' between these domains may have on health. There has been limited qualitative research exploring the meanings and connections people attach to gender, 'work-life balance' and health; this is particularly so for workers who do not occupy managerial or professional jobs. To fill this gap in the literature this qualitative study examined narratives about 'work-life balance' amongst women and men working in 'non-professional' jobs in a single organisation.

Forty semi-structured interviews were carried out with women and men working in administrative, technical and manual jobs within a single organisation based in various cities across the UK. As with the wider labour market, jobs were largely segregated by sex; all the administrative workers were women, whilst all but one of the manual employees were men. The sample included people who worked full-time and part-time, along with participants who also had other employment or were in further education. The sample was diverse in relation to age and family situation.

The study was framed within the context of Clark's (2000) work/family border theory, which aims to explain how individuals balance paid work and family, and construct the borders between these domains. The thesis focused on paid employment, family, leisure, and reported experiences of work-life balance amongst the sample. It concludes by revisiting Clark's work/family border theory, considering the importance of different domains and borders for this sample, and the role of gender within the theory.

The accounts of work-life balance given by these participants differed from those reported in studies of professional employees. Whilst much of the literature problematises paid work as being the main source of conflict, within this sample experiences varied. Due to the relatively low-paid nature of the work carried out amongst the sample, in many instances the necessity of work in providing for self and family predominated over considerations of work-life balance. Borders surrounding the leisure domain were highly permeable, meaning this domain was often compromised by work and family demands.

Participants generally held traditional attitudes to gender roles, particularly in relation to the domestic sphere. This influenced choices constructed around paid work, and experiences of work-life balance. Health was not a key concern, although high levels of

strain in different spheres, particularly in relation to the home and family sphere, led to stress for some participants.

Author's declaration

I declare that, except where acknowledged, all the work has been undertaken by myself.

Sarah Gurney

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1. Chapter 1: Introduction

There has been increasing interest in how people manage the dual demands of paid work and home life, and the consequences that failure to achieve a 'balance' between these domains might have for health. Recent quantitative research has shown links between work-family conflict and poor psychological health, physical health and general well-being (Emslie, Hunt, & Macintyre, 2004). Yet there has been limited qualitative research in this area exploring the meanings and connections workers place on their experiences of work-life balance and health, or the cultural attitudes and norms which may impact on these links. The importance and meaning of 'non-work' and 'non-family' life have also been largely ignored in both the qualitative and the quantitative literature, as have the experiences of men and those in 'non-professional'¹ jobs.

1.1. Research questions

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate how women and men in 'non-professional' occupations perceive and manage the balance between their paid employment and their life outside work, how this impacts on their health, and what role gender plays in this relationship. I used a cross-sectional, work-based study to explore the perceptions of women and men working within one organisation. There were three key research questions:

1. How do women and men in 'non-professional' occupations talk about their lived experiences of work-life balance?
2. How do women and men in 'non-professional' occupations refer to health in relation to their work-life balance?
3. Is there a gendered nature to participants' reports of work-life balance?

¹ 'Non-professional' occupations are defined as a broad range of jobs including manual, routine, low skilled, un-skilled, blue collar and low-income jobs. The inverted commas indicate the contentious nature of the term.

1.2. Work-life balance: the UK context

1.2.1. The UK economic and social context

In order to better understand experiences and perceptions of work-life balance in the UK, it is useful to present some context about the nature of working practices, household structure, domestic work and broader welfare regimes. The structure of the UK workforce changed significantly throughout the 20th century, with increased numbers of women in paid employment, industrial restructuring, and technological changes (Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham, & Vivian, 2001a). Despite these changes, employment, households and domestic work all remain affected by gender norms.

1.2.1.1. The UK economic and social context: UK employment

Whilst the UK has experienced changes in employment in recent years, there remain gender differences in terms of employment rates, hours of work, pay and type of work. There has been a marked increase in the number of women in paid employment in the past 60 years (Hogarth et al., 2001a), yet in 2008, the employment rate² was still 9% higher amongst men than women (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008b).

There are a range of reasons for the rise in female employment rates (Lewis, 2009). For example, rising housing costs have increased the necessity of women contributing towards the household. The increased accessibility of contraception, particularly the contraceptive pill, has allowed women to have more control over their fertility. Furthermore, the rise in the (largely feminised) service sector and the Equal Pay Act 1970, opened up more opportunities for women entering employment.

Whilst women's employment rates have been increasing, many of these jobs are part-time, low skilled and low paid with few prospects of career development (Hogarth et al., 2001a). Almost half of women's jobs are part-time, compared to around one in six of men's (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008b). More men than women work over 45 hours per week (33% as opposed to 10%). Women are more likely to work shorter hours than men, with 4 in 10 female employees working less than 30 hours a week compared to 1 in 10 male employees (Summerfield & Babb, 2004).

² 'Employment rates' are defined as: "the proportion of the population of working age men (aged 16-64) and women (aged 16-59) who are in employment" (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008b).

Whilst the gender pay gap has narrowed in recent years, the gap between women's median hourly pay and men's was still 12.6% in 2007 (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008b). In real terms this meant men received a median hourly rate of £11.96, and women received £10.46.

The UK labour market remains segregated by gender. For example, one fifth of women in employment work in administrative and secretarial jobs, compared to 4% of men (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008b). Men are ten times more likely to be employed in skilled trades than women, and a greater proportion of men than women work as managers, senior officials, and in professional occupations.

Family situation has a marked impact on employment. Whilst employment rates for women and men without dependent children³ are similar (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008b), women with dependent children, particularly pre-school children, are less likely to work than women without dependents. Conversely, men with dependent children are more likely to work than men without dependents (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008b). The impact of parenthood is strongly gendered, with men tending to increase their hours of work when they become fathers whilst women's hours decrease.

1.2.1.2. The UK economic and social context: UK households

Households in the UK have become increasingly diverse in recent years, with greater numbers of single-person households, a decrease in households with dependent children, and an increase in unpaid caring responsibilities for adult relatives. Between 1971 and 2002, the average number of people per household⁴ declined from 2.91 to 2.31 (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008c), and the proportion of single-person households grew from 23% to 31% (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008c), with just under half of these being pensioners (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008a).

The proportion of households containing a married or cohabiting couple with dependent children declined from 31% in 1979 to 21% in 2002 (Office of National Statistics,

³ 'Dependent children' are defined as: "children aged under 16 and those aged 16 to 18 who are never-married and in full-time education" (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008b).

⁴ Household is defined as: "a single person or a group of people who have the address as their only or main residence and who either share one meal a day or share the living accommodation" (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008c).

accessed 2008c), whilst the proportion headed by a lone parent caring for a dependent child has more than doubled since the 1970s to 7% of all households (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008b). Although some of these lone parent households can be accounted for by increased levels of divorce, in more recent years the rise is due to the increased level of childbirth outside of marriage.

In 2001, 13% of the population living in private households provided unpaid care (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008a). The majority of this care is for a family member, with 70% being for parents, parents-in-law, spouses or adult children. Women provide the majority of care both for children and adults in UK households. In 1999 women spent more than twice as much time than men, on average, caring for and ‘playing’ with their own children (Matheson & Summerfield, 2001). Whilst the majority of overall unpaid care is provided by women, in later life the care burden changes, with a more equal number of men and women caring for spouses in old age (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008a).

Men spend less time doing household tasks⁵ than women (2 hours a day compared to 3 hours and 35 minutes for women and men respectively (Summerfield & Babb, 2004)). In 2002, women reported having the main responsibility for the majority of household tasks, apart from making small repairs around the home.

1.2.2. Work-life balance in the UK: the policy context

This section presents an overview of work-life balance policies in the UK at both a national and an organisational level. As will be shown, whilst the broad rhetoric of work-life balance promotes it as a concern applicable to all employees (Hogarth et al., 2001a; Wise, 2003), national and organisational-level work-life balance policy continues to focus on flexible working policies for parents of young children (Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, accessed July 2008; Taylor, 2001; Wise, 2003). Whilst policies are presented in gender neutral terms, in practice the understanding and uptake of these policies is often highly gendered.

⁵ ‘Household tasks’ are defined as cooking, washing-up, housework, washing and ironing (Summerfield & Babb, 2004).

1.2.2.1. Work-life balance in the UK: National policy

The European Employment Strategy prioritises positive work-life balance as a way of achieving increased gender equality (Wise, 2003). To this end, several pieces of legislation have been introduced in the UK following European-level commitments. These include: equal treatment rights for part-time workers; the working time directive, introducing a maximum number of hours to be worked each week, and minimum rest and leave periods (albeit with an opt-out clause); parental leave; time-off for an emergency involving dependants; extended maternity leave (Wise, 2003: p.9).

The extension of paid maternity leave, the introduction of paid paternity leave, and the right to request flexible working for parents of children under the age of 6 and carers of older adults (Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, accessed July 2008), indicates a major shift in UK policy (Lewis & Campbell, 2007; Wise, 2003). This legislative change was accompanied in 2000 by the launch of the UK Labour Government's Work-Life Balance Campaign (Hogarth et al., 2001a), and strong statements of support for work-life balance policies from the Conservative Party (Conservative Party website, accessed 2008). However, despite these developments, policies to address issues work-life imbalance remain a small part of the UK welfare state when measured in terms of public spending (Lewis, 2009).

1.2.2.2. Work-life balance in the UK: Organisational policy

At an organisational level, work-life balance policy largely reflects the national agenda. Arrangements fall into three groups: flexibility in where and when employees work; employer assistance with childcare; and reduction of total working hours (James, in press). As Hyman and colleagues (2001) note, much of this existing policy focuses on the quantity of contractual working hours as opposed to the quality of this time, or on how domestic life may be influenced by paid employment. This is reflected by the focus on working hours, mainly through flexible working policies.

The work-life balance requirements of employees are considered to fall into three categories: working time arrangements, in particular total hours worked and flexibility; parental leave, such as maternity and paternity leave; and childcare provision and support (Gregory & Milner, 2009). To some extent this is reflected in the varied uptake of flexible working policies, both by hours of work and by sex (Summerfield & Babb, 2004).

A fifth of full-time employees and a quarter of part-time employees worked some form of flexible working arrangement in 2003 (Summerfield & Babb, 2004). However, there was a greater uptake of flexible working policies amongst women in general, with 27% of women in full-time employment working any form of flexible working arrangement, compared to 18% of men. Flexible working hours was the most commonly used policy by both women and men working full-time, and by men working part-time, whereas term-time working was most popular amongst women working part-time.

1.2.2.3. Work-life balance in the UK: Gender and policy

Whilst the majority of work-life balance policies, both at a national and an organisational level, are intended to be applicable to all employees (Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham, & Vivian, 2001b; Wise, 2003), policy implementation and uptake is often highly gendered. Although corporate language has shifted away from ‘family-friendly’ policies⁶, which were often implicitly linked with working mothers (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005), the more gender-neutral terms associated with work-life balance are rarely interpreted as gender-neutral in practice (Lewis & Campbell, 2007). As Smithson and Stokoe (2005) note in their study of discourses of work-life balance, “men do not normally ‘do’ flexible working and work-life balance, any more than they did family-friendly working” (p.164). Gender-neutral policies are rarely applied in a gender-neutral way due to the deeply gendered nature of paid employment and the household (Kilkey, 2006). The scoping study carried out for this thesis provides empirical evidence for these theories. It found that understandings of work-life balance were often equated with flexible working policies and the childcare needs of employees, usually female (see chapter 4).

The gender difference in use of work-life balance policies may lead to different value judgements, with policies mainly used by men being seen as ‘preferable’ to those mainly used by women (Bacik & Drew, 2006; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). For example, a mixed-methods study of work-life balance in Irish legal firms (Bacik & Drew, 2006) found that women tended to make more use of flexi-time working hours, job share arrangements, and

⁶ Family-friendly policies are broadly defined as “policies that facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life... [and] facilitate parental choice about work and care” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007: p.13). They include policies such as access to affordable childcare, financial support for children, parental leave, and flexible working policies to allow parents to fulfil caring responsibilities (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007).

part-time hours, whereas few men made use of any form of flexible working arrangement, instead taking leave on an informal basis. Female focus group participants reported adverse impacts on their careers due to use of these formal work-life balance policies in the form of loss of opportunity for promotion, loss of potential clients, and negative perceptions of colleagues. This led to different value judgements being placed upon employees who made use of flexible working policies (mainly women), as opposed to employees who did not.

On a broader level, policies have been accompanied by a move from ‘passive’ to ‘active’ welfare provision, whereby the focus has been on increasing the numbers of individuals in paid employment (Lewis, 2009). Key to this shift has been the rise in female employment and the assumed subsequent increase of women’s financial independence. However, this move in approach presupposes an ‘adult worker model’ (Lewis, 2009) whereby women and men are assumed to be equal in both their working and family life, an assumption that, whilst admirable, is “outrunning the social reality” (Lewis, 2009: p.9). As was highlighted above, both the private and the public sphere remain affected by gender norms, with women often having lower rates of pay and greater levels of domestic and caring responsibilities than their male counterparts. Many of these unpaid caring roles have low values attached to them, or go unacknowledged both at a personal and a State level (Lewis, 1992). By assuming an ‘adult worker model’, welfare regimes fail to situate the issue within the broader structural, social, and cultural picture of ingrained gender norms within the economic and domestic spheres (Caproni, 2004). By shifting the focus, particularly of caring responsibilities, from the public to the private, the onus is placed more firmly with the individual (Bryson, Warner-Smith, Brown, & Fray, 2007; Caproni, 2004; Lewis, 2009; Lewis, Gambles, & Rapoport, 2007).

1.3. Thesis structure

Chapter 2 explores the evolution and understandings of the phrase ‘work-life balance’.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of the literature regarding gender, work-life balance and health. It identifies trends and main findings within the research, along with gaps which this thesis seeks to fill.

Chapter 4 describes the methods and analytical approaches employed within the study, including reflections on researching a workplace setting.

Chapter 5 and 6 set the scene for the study in relation to the quantitative and qualitative data; the former presents the screening questionnaire findings and the latter an overview of the interview participants in relation to paid employment.

The next three chapters are based around Clark's (2000) work/family border theory, focusing in turn on the three domains of paid employment, home and family life and leisure, whilst recognising their interconnectivity with other domains. Chapter 7 examines the reported experiences of paid employment (the 'work' domain), focusing on the key areas of demand, control and social support. Chapter 8 investigates the reported experiences of home and family life (the 'family' domain), focusing on caring responsibilities for children and elderly adult relatives, and domestic work. Chapter 9 focuses on the role of 'leisure' within participants' narratives, exploring the possibility of incorporating a third domain within Clark's model.

Chapter 10 analyses the experiences of work-life balance amongst participants, in particular focusing on reports of conflict, balance, flexibility, and strategies employed to obtain or maintain work-life balance.

Chapter 11 discusses the findings in the context of existing research and social theory. After examining the strengths and weaknesses of the study, it also considers areas for further research and implications for policy.

2. Chapter 2: What is work-life balance?

This chapter explores the evolution of the phrase ‘work-life balance’. It begins by presenting an overview of the origins of the study of work-life balance, with particular focus on role enhancement and role strain. It then outlines the evolution of the phrase from a focus on conflict to the more recent adoption of the term ‘balance’, discusses critiques of the concept, alternative terminologies and presents an overview of the work-life balance literature. Finally, it outlines Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory, which frames this thesis.

2.1. Origins

Academic interest in the intersection between reproductive and productive work arguably stems from Engels’ Marxist text, ‘Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State’ (1884). Engels set a precedent for analysing women’s paid employment in the context of their unpaid domestic labour. Within his analysis he detailed how women’s role within the family defines their role within the public sphere, and how this role lays the foundation for women’s subordination to men within capitalist societies. The originality in Engels’ work comes not only from recognising women’s role within society, an area much neglected by the other ‘founding fathers’ of sociology (Witz & Marshall, 2004), but in recognising the role of both the public and the private sphere in women’s and men’s lives (Littlewood, 2004). Engels described these two areas of life in terms of ‘production’ and ‘reproduction’, stating “the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life” (Engels, 1884).

2.2. Role accumulation and role strain

Academic interest in the intersection between women’s productive and reproductive work began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s (Littlewood, 2004). A key focus within these early studies was the positive and/or negative effects of occupying multiple roles (Barnett & Gareis, 2006; Matthews & Power, 2002), or “role interaction” (Goode, 1960: p.484).

The role strain hypothesis (Goode, 1960) (also known as role conflict) views institutions to be made up of ‘roles’ which connect social behaviour to social structure, linking “the observed acts and inferred values of the individual with the institutional imperatives or requisites of the society” (p.484). Role strain is defined as “the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations” (p.483), which are unique to every person according to their

circumstance. Role strain may arise due to conflict of time, place, or resources; for example, a parent may need to work to earn money to support their family, yet also be at home to provide care for their children, two roles which may not always be compatible. The result of unsuccessfully combining multiple roles is poor health.

Conversely, the role accumulation model (Sieber, 1974) (also known as role enhancement) explores “the possibility that the rewards [of combining multiple roles] might exceed the burdens” (p.569). Positive outcomes of role accumulation may accrue from role privileges (the rights attached to a role), status security (the ‘buffering’ effect of having other roles or relationships in ones life to provide support and resources), resources for status enhancement and role performance (for example being invited to a party, or an introduction to a potential business contact by a friend), and enrichment of personality and ego gratification (the way in which role accumulation may “enrich the personality and enhance one’s self conception” (p.576), thereby maintaining mental health). On this basis, the role accumulation theory believes multiple roles to be “more gratifying than stressful” (p.577), and therefore to benefit health. This is not to say that role strain does not exist, but that role accumulation provides adequate compensation for these strains.

More complex models have also been suggested. One perspective proposes that perceptions of conflict and enhancement are best represented on a continuum (Burr, Leigh, Day, & Constantine, 1979). Conversely, the ‘role perception typology model’ (Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat, & Lang, 1990) hypothesises that both conflict and enhancement can occur simultaneously. However, a study of women and men in the United States (Verbrugge, 1983) found that whilst employment, marriage and parenthood were individually related to good health, with employment having the strongest association, the combination of the three roles had no effect, positive or negative, on health. However, as the author notes, “the analysis may have overlooked more specific role combinations that are very stressful and detrimental to health” (p.27), for example the experiences of lone parents. This contention is expanded upon in a study of women in the United Kingdom (Arber, Gilbert, & Dale, 1985). Role accumulation had beneficial affects on health amongst women without children, and women over the age of 40 with children. However, role strain, leading to poor health, was found for women under 40 who worked full-time and had children. This association was less clear for women in managerial and professional occupations, indicating that access to resources may have an impact on

experiences of role strain. This study supports Verbrugge's (1983) suggestion that multiple roles may impact on different people in different ways according to their circumstances.

2.3. Work-family conflict

The phrase 'work-family conflict' (or work-home conflict) emerged in the 1980s (Barnett, 1999; Barnett & Gareis, 2006), having its origins in the study of multiple roles (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). As with role strain, work-family conflict focuses on tensions arising from women combining reproductive and productive roles (Hammer & Thompson, 2003). Corporate-cultures at the time "explicitly required family matters to be left at the work-place door" (Barnett & Gareis, 2006: p.210). This conceptualisation of work and family as separate entities, competing for time, energy and attention (Barnett, 1998; Marks, 1977), led to the characterisation of "constant tension and perpetual conflict" (Barnett & Gareis, 2006: p.210), as represented by work-family conflict.

One common criticism of work-family conflict is that studies have examined work-family conflict in general, ignoring the direction of conflict (Eagle, Miles, & Icenogle, 1997; Emslie et al., 2004), namely work-to-family (work conflicting with family life) or family-to-work (family life conflict with work). Studies that have taken into account the direction of conflict have found mixed results. Work-to-family conflict has been found to be more prevalent than family-to-work conflict (Eagle et al., 1997; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Swanson, Power, & Simpson, 1998). Some studies have found women experience higher levels of work-to-family conflict than men, but there is no gender difference in family-to-work conflict (McElwain, Korabik, & Rosin, 2005). Others have found different associations with health measures, for example finding work-to-family conflict, but not family-to-work conflict, to be associated with poor health (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Hammer, Saksvik, Nytro, Torvatn, & Bayazit, 2004) (although one study found the reverse (Noor, 2004), with family-to-work conflict being associated with lack of well-being). Furthermore, gender differences have been found in these associations with health, with family-to-work conflict being associated with poor health for men but not women, whereas work-to-family conflict was associated with poor health for women but not men (Macewen & Barling, 1994).

The work-family conflict model has been critiqued on other grounds. Firstly, it presupposes conflict, whereas a more accurate representation of life may be "one in which

work and family are seen as overlapping spheres that are often in harmony” (Barnett, 1998: p.217). Furthermore, the model prioritises the spheres of ‘work’ and ‘family’ above all others, potentially ignoring individuals without children, and drawing a divide between the two spheres which may not allow for different conceptions of work (for example, unpaid domestic work (Oakley, 1974)).

The concept of ‘work-family balance’, “the extent to which individuals are equally involved in - and equally satisfied with – their work role and their family role” (Greenhaus & Singh, 2003), goes some way to addressing these concerns, suggesting that giving equal priority to both roles can reduce or even resolve conflict (Gregory & Milner, 2009).

2.4. Work-life balance

The concept ‘work-life balance’ allows for a wider understanding of ‘non-work’ areas of life, incorporating workers with diverse family situations, giving increased scope to include men, and allowing for spillover and fluidity between work and other areas of life (Gregory & Milner, 2009). Whilst there is no one definition of work-life balance (Kalliath & Brough, 2008), it can be conceptualised as “the relationship between institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labour markets” (Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea, & Walters, 2002: p.56); i.e. the relationship between paid employment and other areas of life. A more specific definition has been adopted by Clark: “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict” (2000: p.751).

However, the concept of work-life balance has also been critiqued. Firstly, the concept of ‘balance’ is thought to reinforce the separateness between paid employment and other areas of life, focusing on the movement between roles as opposed to “multiple role interactions” (Speakman & Marchington, 2004: p.135). This approach fails to encompass the interactive nature of life, where there is “no clear-cut distinction between the world of work and the work of family, friends, and social networks and community” (Taylor, 2001: p.17). This is reflected in a qualitative study of fathers who worked from home several days a week for an insurance firm (Halford, 2006). For these men, the public and private boundaries continued to exist, but in a different form to the work-home binary model: “there is nothing fixed, permanent or objective about these public / private boundaries. Rather, in contextually specific, situated circumstances people make (or feel the need to be seen to make) distinctions” (Halford, 2006: p.400).

Secondly, there is a danger that by applying boundaries to spheres of activity, the assumption that activities not considered to be paid employment are classed as ‘non-work’ is reinforced (Speakman & Marchington, 2004), thereby ‘othering’ areas of life outside of paid employment. This approach may not allow for individual values placed upon roles, for example the notion of housework as ‘work’ (Oakley, 1974), or paid employment being a site for “subcultural expression” (Finchman, 2008: p.631). There is often a narrow understanding of the ‘life’ component of the concept, ignoring issues of ethnicity, culture and religion (Kamenou, 2008). Furthermore, it has been argued that this dichotomy is unhelpful due to living within “an institutional system that subordinates home to the economy” (Connell, 2002: p.382). This raises the question of whether balance can be achieved within a system already skewed in favour of paid employment.

Thirdly, whilst the concept of work-life balance purports to be gender neutral (Gerson, 2004; Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham, & Vivian, 2001; Lewis, Gambles, & Rapoport, 2007; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005), by being situated within “wider discursive spaces constructing particular gender assumptions and dynamics” (Lewis et al., 2007: p.364), the claim to neutrality instead both hides and reinforces gender inequalities. This is evidenced by a number of studies which have found work-life balance policies to have gendered assumptions attached to them regarding for whom they are applicable for, to whom they are made available (in both instances predominantly working mothers), and the implications for individuals of making use of relevant policies (Kilkey, 2006; Lewis & Campbell, 2007; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005; Wise & Bond, 2003). Furthermore, much work-life balance discourse has been narrowly applied, focusing predominantly on heterosexual, two-parent families with children (Lewis, Rapoport, & Gambles, 2003).

It has also been argued that work-life balance relies on a ‘clock-time’ worldview, whereby work and life are quantifiable through the understanding of time as “a measurable and value-able unit” (Roberts, 2008: p.432). In doing so paid employment is considered more economically productive and valuable, meaning any “left-over clock time” (Roberts, 2008: p.432) is viewed as ‘life’. However, this time-based approach fails to account for the quality as well as the quantity of time allocated to different activities (Hyman, Baldry, & Bunzel, 2001).

By focusing on individuals achieving balance in their lives (for example, see Clutterbuck, 2003), the concept fails to situate the issue within the broader structural, social, and cultural picture of ingrained gender norms within the economic and domestic spheres

(Caproni, 2004). By shifting the focus from public issues such as ‘family-friendly policies’, the onus for achieving balance is placed more firmly with the individual (Bryson, Warner-Smith, Brown, & Fray, 2007; Caproni, 2004; Lewis, 2009; Lewis et al., 2007).

Furthermore, work-life balance is widely assumed to be a ‘choice’ which individuals are free to make (Caproni, 2004; Clutterbuck, 2003; Lewis et al., 2007). However, as is evidenced in a study of work-life balance across several countries (Lewis et al., 2007), there are often contradictions presented in relation to this ‘choice’. For example, some participants described happily choosing to work long hours, yet blamed themselves for not being able to achieve a ‘balance’ between these long hours and their personal lives.

Finally, it assumes that obtaining such a balance is feasible (Caproni, 2004; Kamenou, 2008), implying “that there is some ideal and fairly stable recipe which involves certain measures or quantities of work and life” (Roberts, 2008: p.434).

2.5. Alternatives to terminologies

In order to address the concerns outlined above, a variety of alternative concepts to work-life balance have been developed, including ‘work-family reconciliation’ (Lewis, 2009), ‘work-family integration’ (Desrochers & Sargent, 2003), ‘work-family linkages’ (Lambert, 1990), ‘work-personal life harmonisation’ (Gregory & Milner, 2009) and ‘work-life articulation’ (Gregory & Milner, 2009).

Work-family reconciliation has been proposed as an alternative to work-life balance (Lewis, 2009; Mahon, 2006). Whilst ‘balance’ may imply an achievable equilibrium between work and life (Caproni, 2004; Kamenou, 2008; Roberts, 2008), terms such as ‘reconciliation’ and ‘harmonisation’ instead imply a coexistence between domains. Originating from continental Western Europe (Lewis, 2009), the concept of work-life reconciliation marks a shift from welfare policies designed to support a male breadwinner model by primarily providing support to women’s, primarily mother’s, caregiving roles towards those aimed at supporting mother-wage earners (Mahon, 2006). This has been triggered by the increase in women in employment (Evans, 2001; Mahon, 2006). However, as for ‘work-life balance’ (Gerson, 2004; Hogarth et al., 2001; Lewis et al., 2007; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005), ‘harmonisation’ has also been critiqued for ignoring or even reinforcing gender norms due to focusing on enabling women to combine paid employment with caring responsibilities whilst men’s domestic and caring involvement remains largely unchanged (Evans, 2001; Lewis, 2009; Mahon, 2006).

Another alternative terminology to work-life balance is ‘work-family integration’ (Desrochers & Sargent, 2003). Addressing the critique that ‘balance’ may reinforce the separateness between paid employment and other areas of life (Speakman & Marchington, 2004; Taylor, 2001), ‘integration’ allows for the understanding that different areas of life are permeable (Clark, 2000; Pleck, 1977). However, this concept has too been criticised by allowing for a potential merging of the work and family spheres, leading to concerns of “contamination” (Gregory & Milner, 2009: p.2) of one domain by another.

Despite the various problems surrounding the concept, work-life balance remains a well understood (Lewin, 2005), dominant term used by policy makers and employers (James, in press). Whilst the terminology of work-life balance may be problematic, no satisfactory alternative has yet been proposed. Furthermore, by recognising the critiques outlined above and addressing them within an analysis of work-life balance, it may be possible that a “questioning of prevailing values and practices” (Lewis et al., 2007: p.370) may be provoked, thereby shifting understanding of the concept. Work-life balance is therefore the phrase employed within this thesis, while recognising its contested nature.

2.6. Review of the work-life balance literature

This section presents an overview of the main focuses of the work-life balance literature, particularly drawing on reviews in the area⁷. Much of this literature focuses on three broad areas: time management; inter-role conflict in the form of role overload and role interference; and the care of dependents (Gregory & Milner, 2009). Lewis and colleagues (2007) identify two broad discourses surrounding work-life balance: personal control of time, and workplace flexibility. The former focuses on time based constraints experienced by affluent, professional, white-collar workers, placing the onus on the individual (or the family) to achieve balance. The latter views work-life balance as a characteristic of workplaces, as indicated by the existence and awareness, but not necessarily the implementation, of flexibility policies.

Many studies focus on gender (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). Specifically, there is a strong focus on how parents (particularly mothers) balance their caring and work responsibilities (Gregory & Milner, 2009; Kamenou, 2008). However, there is a dearth of

⁷ NB: the literature specifically relating to gender, work-life balance and health is presented in the next chapter.

evidence surrounding non-parents' experiences of work-life balance (Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Emslie et al., 2004; Taylor, 2001).

Work-family relationships are complex, with work influencing family, and family influencing work in different and multiple ways (Barnett, 1998; Eby et al., 2005). However there is limited research on positive connections between domains (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002) which is needed to better understand the complexities of interactions (Eby et al., 2005). There is also a virtual omission of 'non-work' domains (for example, leisure activities, community, church, volunteer roles and social support) on the work-family relationship (Eby et al., 2005).

Perhaps due to the evidence that work interferes with family life to a greater extent than family life interferes with work (Eagle et al., 1997; Frone et al., 1992; Swanson et al., 1998), many studies predict an unfavourable relationship between work and family (Eby et al., 2005; Guest, 2002). Furthermore, a review of the literature on the quality of work and 'non-work' life found that minority and low-income families are largely invisible within the literature (Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991).

2.7. Conceptual framework: Work/family border theory

This thesis is loosely guided by Clark's (2000) work/family border theory. This theory aims to explain "how individuals manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance" (p.750). The concept of 'work' and 'family' constituting different domains or spheres which influence each other is central to the model.

Clark defines 'balance' as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict" (p.751), stating that "though many aspects of work and home are difficult to alter, individuals can shape to some degree the nature of the work and home domains, and the borders and bridges between them, in order to create a desired balance" (p.751). She notes that it is this proactive shaping of domains (work and family) by individuals which differentiates work/family border theory from much of the literature on work and family conflict that assumes individuals to be purely reactive to their situations.

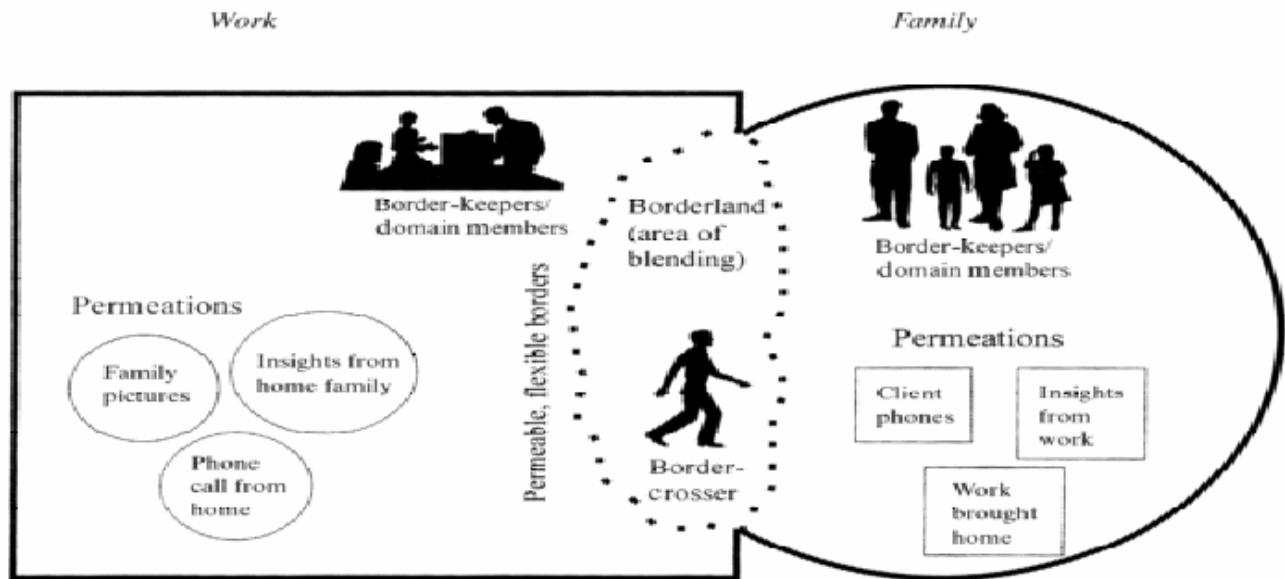


Figure 1. A pictorial representation of work/family border theory (Clark, 2000: p.754)

Clark uses the diagram above (figure 1) to graphically demonstrate the central concepts of work/family border theory. ‘Work’ and ‘family’ are seen as separate domains or worlds which are associated with different rules, thought patterns and behaviours. Borders are the delineation between domains, indicating the point at which domain-specific behaviour can begin and end. There are three main forms of border: physical (borders defining where domain-relevant behaviour can take place, such as the location of paid employment), temporal (borders which divide when tasks can be done, for example set working hours), and psychological (borders defining which thinking patterns, behaviour and emotion are suitable to which domain). It is this recognition of tangible (physical and temporal) as well as psychological borders which make work/family border theory distinct from that of boundary theory (Desrochers & Sargent, 2003), whilst the understanding of the differing natures of boundaries as permeable, malleable, dynamic, and changing (McKie, Cunningham-Burley, & McKenrick, 2005; Speakman & Marchington, 2004) provides greater insight into behaviours in different domains.

The strength of borders may differ in either direction depending on the permeability and level of blending in either direction, with the border being stronger in the direction of the stronger domain, and weaker in the direction of the weaker domain. Clark uses the

example of an individual needing to be flexible in their home life in order to work additional hours at short notice but not being allowed the same flexibility for home issues to demonstrate a strong border between work and home. Conversely, an example of an individual with strong borders between home and work would be someone who has flexibility over their working hours but not in when they can collect their child from school.

Borders vary in permeability (the level that aspects of each domain may enter the other) and flexibility (the level that borders contract or expand to allow for the demands of one domain on the other). When a high level of permeability and flexibility exists, blending occurs, creating a 'borderland' which no longer belongs exclusively to either domain. The strength of borders may differ in either direction depending on the permeability and level of blending in either direction, with the border being stronger in the direction of the stronger domain, and weaker in the direction of the weaker one.

Border-crossers are the people who move between domains, whilst border-keepers are people who seek to maintain border between work and family life (for example, managers at work and partners at home). Domain members are people specific to each domain who may be influential in defining borders and domains but do not necessarily have the power of the border-keepers (for example, colleagues at work and children at home). Embedded within Clark's theory is the notion of centrality; the degree to which border crossers' influence and identify with each domain. Work/family border theory suggests that someone who is central to both domains (work and family) will have greater jurisdiction over the domains and therefore be more likely to have a positive work-life balance than those with on the periphery (Donald & Linington, 2009).

However, whilst work/family border theory is a useful way of conceptualising work-life balance, it has been critiqued. As was noted in a study of gender and work-life balance amongst women and men in mid-life (Emslie & Hunt, 2009), the theory is largely gender-blind. Emslie and Hunt note that the border between work and family may be of more importance to men than women, with the hypothetical single domain of 'family' comprising of many, often conflicting domains (for example, caring for children and elderly relatives) for women, meaning they become border-crossers more frequently than men. Temporal borders surrounding family life may also vary between women and men, in particular in the way women and men in the study discussed being a parent, with fathers' roles more often limited to specific times, such as being with their children at the weekend.

Finally, border strength may be influenced by gender and socio-economic structures; those with greater resources may be better able to be proactive in changing and strengthening the borders between work and home, for example by reducing their working hours. This indicates that, in addition to gender, the model should consider socio-economic factors, such as access to resources, in individuals' ability to shape their domains, and the borders and bridges between them.

Work/family border theory also focuses on the domains of work and family to the exclusion of any other areas of life. Clark justifies this focus by stating work and family are “the two most important aspects of people’s lives” (2000: p.767). Whilst the theory allows for individuals to attach different values to the domains of work and family, it appears to be largely focused on the needs of parents and carers, failing to take account of the importance attached to other domains, such as leisure, sport, and socialising. In order to avoid “essentialising experiences” (Kamenou, 2008: p.S107) a broader acknowledgment and understanding of different forms of ‘life’ is needed, taking into account the needs and experiences of people in a range of personal situations (Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham, & Vivian, 2001; Taylor, 2001; Wise, 2003).

Furthermore, Clark’s model has been critiqued for failing to acknowledging the constructed nature of the home and work domains (Cohen, Duberley, & Musson, 2009), instead implying that these areas of life are ‘facts’, “taking people’s fixed understandings of home and work spheres as evidence of their existence” (Cohen et al., 2009: p.231).

2.8. Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the evolution and definition of the phrase ‘work-life balance’, defining it as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict” (Clark, 2000: p.751). Loosely framed by Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory, this thesis focuses on the ways in which participants shape the domains of work and home, the interaction between these domains (borders and bridges), and the potential creation of balance. In doing so, it also aims to consider how gender and socio-economic factors affect the model, and the possibility of the existence of other non-work and non-family domains, namely a third domain of ‘leisure’. Following this discussion, the next chapter shall examine the literature focusing specifically on gender, work-life balance and health.

3. Chapter 3: Literature review

This chapter presents an overview of the literature within which the study of gender, work-life balance and health in the UK is situated. It concludes that gender and health have complicated associations with work-life balance, there is little research exploring the experiences of people in ‘non-professional’ occupations, and there is minimal qualitative research in this area. This thesis aims to fill this gap in the literature.

3.1. Search strategy

The literature was searched using the online databases Web of Knowledge and Medline, and the search engine Google Scholar, for articles written in English with titles or abstracts featuring various combinations of keywords, including: work-life*, work-family*, work-home*, health, stress, gender, men, male, women, female. A coding sheet was used to decide which articles were relevant (appendix A). The main criterion for selection was that the study examined the area of ‘work-life balance’ in relation to gender and/or health. Studies in developing countries were not included.

Following this search, additional books and articles were obtained from bibliographies and recommendations from colleagues. Relevant journal articles, books and reports were also obtained through mailing lists and networks such as the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) information bulletins and the Equal Opportunities Commission newsletters. Regular electronic journal table of contents alerts were received using the keywords given above, and various books, in particular theory-based texts, were obtained through searching university library catalogues.

This was never intended to be a systematic review. However, it is felt that the variety of search strategies has led to a sufficiently wide-ranging review of the literature.

3.2. Overview of studies: sample, location and focus

Most studies were carried out in the United States, whilst the rest were based in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, Spain, Switzerland, or the United Kingdom. The majority of studies identified were quantitative.

Most of the 49 quantitative studies included in this review used general population (involving people employed in a range of occupations) or work-based (drawn from one or more workplaces) samples, focusing predominantly on working parents.

The 25 qualitative studies identified were split between single sex and mixed samples. However, in some of the mixed samples men were in the minority (for example, 17 men out of a total sample of 55 (Bryson et al., 2007) and 3 men out of a total sample of 17 (Majomi, Brown, & Crawford, 2003)), or distribution by sex wasn't noted (Hyman, Baldry, Scholarios, & Bunzel, 2003; Laegran, 2008). Few studies included equal numbers of women and men. Furthermore, much of the research exploring men's experiences of work-life balance has taken place in the last decade (for example Halford, 2006; Halrynjo, 2009; Hatten, Vinter, & Williams, 2002; Smith & Winchester, 1998; Speakman & Marchington, 1999, 2004; Stockley & Daly, 1999; Williams, 2007). Like the quantitative studies, some qualitative studies used general population samples. However, the majority used work-based samples. In contrast to the quantitative literature, less than half of the qualitative studies sampled on the basis of family type, involving working parents or people who were married or cohabiting.

3.3. Gender and work-life balance

Within this analysis gender is understood as a social structure (Connell, 2002), the conceptualisation of masculinity and femininity, as opposed to an expression of biology (Oakley, 1981b). Furthermore, gender is viewed as a "dynamic set of socially constructed relationships" (Emslie & Hunt, 2009: p.152), and is therefore continually constructed and negotiated across the lifecourse (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

This section outlines the literature examining the gendered nature of work-life balance (and related measures such as role conflict, work-family conflict, work-family spillover, work/life interface, etc). Studies employing quantitative and qualitative methodologies necessarily have a different focus. Quantitative studies tend to examine associations between various forms of balance and imbalance by gender, whilst qualitative studies lend themselves to exploring gendered experiences and perceptions of work-life balance. For this reason this section is divided into two parts; firstly, an overview of the quantitative literature examining gender and work-life balance, and secondly the qualitative literature. Mixed method studies have been incorporated into both sections, depending on whether the relevant finding was generated from quantitative or qualitative data.

3.3.1. Gender and work-life balance: quantitative literature

Some studies have found evidence of gender differences in work-life balance, the predominant finding being that women experience higher work-to-family conflict than men (Berntsson, Lundberg, & Krantz, 2006; Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994; Franakenhaeuser, Lundberg, Fredrikson, Melin, Tuomisto, Myrsten et al., 1989; Greenglass & Burke, 1988; Lundberg, Mardberg, & Frankenhaeuser, 1994; Marshall & Barnett, 1993; Williams & Alliger, 1994). However, a study of employed people in the Netherlands (Jansen, Kant, Kristensen, & Nijhuis, 2003) and a study of working students in the United States (Eagle, Icenogle, Maes, & Miles, 1998) found that men experienced significantly higher levels of work-to-family conflict than women. In some cases the direction of conflict was important. For example, a general population study of professional employees in Canada (McElwain et al., 2005) found that, whilst there were no gender differences in family-to-work conflict, women experienced higher levels of work-to-family conflict.

Some of the studies examining gender and work-life balance used general population samples. However, due to the gendered structure of the labour market, gender comparisons within general population samples are problematic as they do not tend to compare like with like (Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Emslie et al., 2004; Lundberg, 1996).

Several studies did not find gender differences in reported work-life balance (Biggs & Brough, 2005; Eagle et al., 1997; Emslie et al., 2004; Milkie & Peltola, 1999; Stevens, Kiger, & Riley, 2006; Swanson et al., 1998; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1999; Winslow, 2005). Three of these studies compared women and men in similar occupations; university students (Biggs & Brough, 2005), bank employees (Emslie et al., 2004) and correctional officers (Triplett et al., 1999). Interestingly, a United States general population study of work-to-family conflict in 1977 compared with 1997 (Winslow, 2005) found that whilst women and men experienced similar levels of conflict at both dates, men experienced the greatest increase over time, indicating that men's experiences of work-family conflict may be changing. Furthermore, gender stratification of the labour market may have an impact. For example, whilst a Swiss general population sample (Hämmig & Bauer, 2009) found no differences in women's and men's work-life balance across the complete sample, when occupation was taken into account differences were found, with women working in full-time or higher occupational positions reporting higher levels of conflict than men.

Many studies highlighted the gendered nature of predictors of work-life balance. For example, in a general population study in Sweden (Gronlund, 2007), work-family conflict was reduced through high levels of job control for women only. Two studies of women and men in similar situations also found evidence for gendered predictors of work-life balance. A study of university students in Australia (Biggs & Brough, 2005) found that as role salience⁸ increased, women experienced higher work-family conflict, whereas men's work-family conflict decreased. A study of bank employees in the UK (Emslie et al., 2004) found that whilst there were no significant gender differences in perceptions of work-home conflict, there were gender differences in predictors of this conflict. Having children and working in a senior position were found to be a predictor of work-home conflict for women but not for men, whilst working unsociable hours was a stronger predictor of work-home conflict for men than for women. However, a general population study of dual-earner couples in the United States (Marshall & Barnett, 1993) found that whilst mothers experienced higher levels of work-family strains and gains than fathers and non-parents, there were no gender differences in the predictors of these gains and strains.

Finally, socioeconomic factors were also found to play a role in work-life balance. For example, a mixed method study of men working across a range of occupations in several European countries (Halrynjo, 2009) found that participants with higher levels of job security were more likely to "outsource life" (p.119) to achieve work-life balance, through employing cleaners or childminders, whereas those with low income, low job security and poorer career opportunities tended to have greater care responsibilities, possibly due to less access to resources.

3.3.2. Gender and work-life balance: qualitative literature

Quantitative studies do not shed light on how women and men "understand and negotiate the intersections between work and home life" (Emslie & Hunt, 2009: p.154). However, relatively few qualitative studies compared women's and men's perceptions of work-life balance. Most of the studies found that conflict reported by participants was exacerbated by gendered norms and expectations (Bacik & Drew, 2006; Backett, 1982; Bryson et al., 2007; Charles & Harris, 2007; Connell, 2005; Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Grzywacz, Arcury,

⁸ 'Role salience' is defined as the value individuals place on different roles. For example, the level at which an individual values their role as a worker or as a parent (Biggs & Brough, 2005).

Marin, Carrillo, Burke, Coates et al., 2007; Halford, 2006; Halford, Svage, & Witz, 1997; Hatten et al., 2002; Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson, & Andrey, 2008; James, in press; Laegran, 2008; Linehan & Walsh, 2000; Loscocco, 1997; Speakman & Marchington, 1999; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). The importance of socio-economic factors was considered in a small number of studies (Backett-Milburn, Airey, McKie, & Hogg, 2008; Weigt & Solomon, 2008), as was the impact of parenthood on experiences of work-life balance (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; James, in press; Linehan & Walsh, 2000; Stockley & Daly, 1999).

A study of UK home-based teleworkers (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001) found that, whilst the majority of women and men reported that working from home led to a breakdown of boundaries between work and home, women and men experienced this in different ways. Working from home allowed women to perform multiple roles, continuing to fulfil their domestic responsibilities whilst accomplishing their financial and personal need to work, thereby reinforcing gendered expectations of work and family. For men, the flexibility gained from working from home allowed them to work long hours, thereby reinforcing gendered norms around work. The men in the study reported higher levels of interference between work and home than the reverse, reinforcing the normalised legitimacy of work interfering with family for men, and family interfering with work for women. This reinforcement of gendered norms was supported by a study of fathers in the United Kingdom who worked from home several days a week for an insurance firm (Halford, 2006). Whilst participants found some changes to their fathering patterns and involvement, this was viewed as “unearned and unexpected, a perk that they would regret losing, but did not expect to keep” (p.399), with the fathers’ roles being inextricably entwined with that of provider.

Loscocco (1997) found similarly gendered experiences in her study of self-employed people in the United States. Women and men were found to fulfil gender norms in different ways, with women accommodating work to fit with family life, whereas men prioritised their business. As with Sullivan and Lewis’ (2001) study of home-based teleworkers, understandings of flexibility were gendered. Women emphasised the importance of flexibility in balancing their paid employment and family responsibilities, whereas men saw flexibility as a symbol of control, rarely making use of flexibility for work-life balance needs.

A study of fathers working across a range of organisations in the United Kingdom (Hatten et al., 2002) found that work-place culture played a large role in participants’ experiences

of work-life balance. For example, many employers expected work to be the primary focus of male workers' lives, thereby leaving little space for family commitments. This was reinforced by the assumption amongst participants that flexibility of working patterns in order to accommodate caring responsibilities was acceptable for working mothers but not for fathers. Gendered assumptions about care and flexibility were perpetuated both at an organisational-level, and by the workers themselves.

It should be noted that some studies found reported differences within as well as between women and men. For example, the study of home-based teleworkers (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001) found that parental status and career involvement mediated women's experiences of work-life balance, with women with young children reporting higher levels of family to work interference, and women with high career involvement experiencing higher levels of intrusion from work to family.

The family is a primary site where gender norms are reproduced (Loscocco, 1997), and thereby parenthood has been found to exacerbate gender norms and differences in experiences of work-life balance (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Linehan & Walsh, 2000; Stockley & Daly, 1999). For example, a study of mothers working as head coaches for sporting institutions in the United States (Bruening & Dixon, 2008) found that "the dramatic life changes associated with the birth of the first child illuminated the gendered nature of the sports industry" (p.21). Furthermore, the importance of support from family and employers was reported to be essential to ensure participants 'survived and thrived' (p.20) as coaches and mothers, a factor which had not been a consideration prior to parenthood.

Few studies considered the impact of class on experiences of work-life balance. However, a comparative analysis of working mothers in low-income, service sector jobs, and assistant professors in the United States (Weigt & Solomon, 2008) found interesting intersectionalities between class and gender. As might be expected, the assistant professors were more able to manage work and family demands due to greater access to resources, whereas the low-income women's experiences of work-family management was inextricably tied to "making ends meet" (p.641). However, class had an additional impact on gender for the two groups, being found to 'mute' gendered experiences for the assistant professors, whilst it intensified them for the low-income, service sector group. For example, the low-income workers reported "gendered interpersonal work of managing supervisors' or employers' impressions and emotions" (p.642) in order to obtain flexibility,

whereas the assistant professors were found to have better access to institutional policies and therefore avoided this interpersonal work. Furthermore, the higher incomes of the assistant professors meant they were better able to pay for childcare than the low-income women.

3.4. Work-life balance and health

This section presents an overview of literature which has investigated the relationship between work-life balance and health, again divided into quantitative and qualitative sections.

3.4.1. Work-life balance and health: quantitative literature

The majority of the literature examining the relationship between work-life balance and health employs quantitative methods. Most studies found associations between work-life imbalance and poor health, but there were some contradictory findings. The direction of imbalance (i.e. paid employment interfering with home life as opposed to home life interfering with paid employment) was found in some studies to have an impact on health.

Many studies found evidence of associations between work-life imbalance and poor mental health (Bromet, Dew, Parkinson, Cohen, & Schwartz, 1992; Chandola, Martikainen, Bartley, Lahelma, Marmot, Michikazu et al., 2004; Emslie et al., 2004; Frone, 2000; Frone, Russell, & Barnes, 1996; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001; Grice, Feda, McGovern, Alexander, McCaffrey, & Ukestad, 2007; Grzywacz, 2000; Hämmig & Bauer, 2009; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, & Hildreth, 1992; Triplett et al., 1999; Vinokur, Pierce, & Buck, 1999; Wang, Lesage, Schmitz, & Drapeau, 2008), as well as stress (Hammer et al., 2004; He, Zhao, & Archbold, 2002), negative moods (Frone, 2000; Williams & Alliger, 1994) and burnout (Greenglass & Burke, 1988). Associations were also found between a perceived lack of work-life balance and poor physical health (Emslie et al., 2004; Frone et al., 1996; Frone et al., 1997; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Grzywacz, 2000) and poor self-assessed health (Emslie et al., 2004; Nylen, Melin, & Laflamme, 2007; Winter, Roos, Rahkonen, Martikainen, & Lahelma, 2006). Fatigue and sleep related effects were found by a number of studies (Bromet et al., 1992; Hämmig & Bauer, 2009; Jansen et al., 2003; Nylen et al., 2007). Evidence of an association between lack of work-life balance and lack of life satisfaction (Adams et al., 1996), lack of general well-being (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Noor, 2004), hypertension (Frone et al.,

1997), and health related behaviours such as heavy alcohol use (Frone et al., 1996; Frone et al., 1997; Roos, Lahelma, & Rahkonen, 2006) were also found.

Three studies identified other factors aside from combining roles as being primarily responsible for poor health. A study of Swedish white-collar employees (Berntsson et al., 2006) found that total workload as opposed to number of roles was related to increased levels of stress. Matthews and Power (2002) found that whilst work and home factors were associated separately with distress amongst British women, the combined effect of these factors did not account for the class gradient in distress (i.e. that women in lower social classes reported higher psychological distress). Furthermore, a study of working mothers in dual-earner relationships in the United States (Tingey & Kiger, 1996) found that respondents' work-to-family spillover was not significantly related to stress, whereas perceptions of their partners' spillover was. However, this study used a relatively small sample (n=72).

Studies examining different directions of conflict (i.e. distinguishing between work-to-home and home-to-work conflict) found mixed results. Three studies found that work-to-family conflict was associated with negative outcomes, including increased symptoms (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Hammer et al., 2004) and decreased life satisfaction (Adams et al., 1996), whereas family-to-work conflict was not. However, a study of working mothers in the United Kingdom (Noor, 2004) found that family-to-work as opposed to work-to-family conflict was associated with lack of well-being.

Other studies found more complex results (Allen & Armstrong, 2006; Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Frone et al., 1997; Grice et al., 2007; Roos, Sarlio-Lahteenkorva, Lallukka, & Lahelma, 2007). For example, a study of female and male teachers in the United States (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984) found that, whilst both work and family roles exacerbate strain, they did so in different ways. Work roles generally induced strains, whereas family roles were more complex, both inducing and reducing strain. Other studies found that different forms of conflict impacted on different health related behaviours in different ways. A study of employed parents in the United States (Allen & Armstrong, 2006) found that family-to-work conflict was associated with reduced levels of physical activity and eating less healthy food, while work-to-family conflict was related to eating more fatty foods.

Few studies have examined the impact of work-life balance on health longitudinally, and therefore the causal direction of this relationship. One exception is a study examining the

relationship of work-to-family conflict to depression, poor physical health, heavy alcohol use, and hypertension among employed parents in the United States over a four year period (Frone et al., 1997). They found that family-to-work conflict was related longitudinally to subsequent increased levels of depression, poor physical health and hypertension, whilst work-to-family conflict was related to heavy alcohol consumption.

Only two studies reported positive interactions between paid work and other areas of life. A study of employed women and men in the United States (O'Driscoll et al., 1992) found that increased time spent on 'off-job' activities, such as family, leisure and community involvement, led to a decrease in role strain and psychological strain. Furthermore, a study of employed women and men in mid-life in the United States (Grzywacz, 2000) found that positive spillover⁹ between work and family, and family and work, was associated with better physical and mental health.

3.4.2. Work-life balance and health: qualitative literature

Whilst the majority of literature examining the relationship between work-life balance and health utilize quantitative methods, a small number of qualitative studies were found.

A study of employed mothers with primary school aged children in Scotland (Cunningham-Burley, Backett-Milburn, & Kemmer, 2006) found paid employment to be generally good for health, but that overload of work and domestic life responsibilities were identified by participants as causing them to feel stressed and "shattered" (p.402). Another single-sex study, involving female nursing assistants in the United States (Nelson, 1997), found that fatigue as a result of occupying multiple roles was common amongst participants, and to a large extent normalised. In addition, multiple roles were found to limit the amount of time the nursing assistants had to engage in positive health practices such as regular health checkups and relaxing.

Two mixed-sex studies also reported poor health as a result of work-life imbalance. A study of female and male community mental health nurses in the UK (Majomi et al., 2003)

⁹ 'Positive spillover' is defined as the 'good fit' between work and home life, for example, the "skills and opportunities gained through employment [that] may make for a better family member, while family experiences and support may make for a better worker" (Grzywacz, 2000: p.236). Conversely, 'negative spillover' is "the extent to which employment obligations intrude upon family life and family obligations interfere with worker productivity" (p.236).

found that combining family and work responsibilities led to reported stress and strain amongst participants. These problems escalated, leading to punctuated periods of ill health and job re-evaluation. Hyman and colleagues' (2003) study of call centre and software firm employees in the UK found that the intrusions between work and other areas of life took on different forms and intensities depending on the nature of the work. Call centre employees were unable to physically take their work home in the way the software workers could. However, this did not limit the levels of spillover for the call centre employees but instead changed the form it took, manifesting itself in terms of juggling working hours with family demands, and fatigue and stress caused by work. The study found that work-home conflict led to exhaustion, inability to sleep and a constant awareness of work issues outside of work.

Only one of the qualitative studies reported low levels of work-family conflict and little evidence of conflict being associated with poor health. A study of female and male immigrant Latino poultry workers living in the United States (Grzywacz et al., 2007) found infrequent levels of work-family conflict. The authors suggest that people from collectivist cultures, such as the participants in this study, may experience lower levels of conflict than in individualist cultures such as the United States and the United Kingdom. This could be due to work and family being viewed as more integrated, with paid employment being seen as a "necessary and vital component" (p.1127) of family well-being. Furthermore, there was little evidence of work-family conflict being associated with poor health amongst this sample of workers. Whilst being unsure of the reason for this finding, the authors hypothesise that the physically demanding nature of poultry work may overwhelm any possible health effects as a result of work-family conflict.

Health can also be considered a facilitator for balancing work and home. For example, a study of African-Caribbean and white working class fathers in the United Kingdom (Williams, 2007) found that health was considered an "asset" (p.347) which allowed them to actively participate in paid work and fathering.

3.5. Gender, work-life balance and health

This section presents an overview of the literature investigating the relationship between gender, work-life balance and health, again divided into quantitative and qualitative studies.

3.5.1. Gender, work-life balance and health: quantitative literature

Gender differences in the relationship between work-life balance and health are not clear. It has been hypothesised men have a greater role attachment to the work sphere, whilst women have greater role attachment to the domestic sphere, indicating that work-to-family conflict would have a greater impact on women's as opposed to men's health, due to their greater socialised attachment to the domestic sphere (Frone, 2000; Frone et al., 1996; Macewen & Barling, 1994; Pleck, 1977). However, the empirical evidence for this hypothesis is lacking.

Some studies have found evidence for gender differences, including a study of teachers with children living at home in Canada (Greenglass & Burke, 1988), which found that role conflict was a significant predictor of burnout for women but not for men. A study of police officers in Canada (Macewen & Barling, 1994) found that family-to-work conflict was significantly linked to anxiety and depression for men but not for women, whereas work-to-family conflict was significantly associated to anxiety and depression for women. Similarly, whilst female and male correctional officers in the United States (Triplett et al., 1999) were found to experience similar levels of work-home conflict, this conflict led to work-related stress for women but not for men. However, two of these studies had low response rates (38% (Greenglass & Burke, 1988) and 54% (Triplett et al., 1999)), whilst the police study (Macewen & Barling, 1994) used a relatively small sample (n=40).

Other studies found mixed results. For example, a study of female and male public sector employees in Finland, Japan and the United Kingdom (Chandola et al., 2004) found that family-to-work conflict led to poorer mental health in women than men in the UK, whereas no gender differences were found in Finland or Japan. A study of middle-aged Finnish municipal workers (Roos et al., 2006; Roos et al., 2007) found that work-to-family conflict was associated with heavy drinking amongst women but not men, whereas there were no gender differences in the relationship between work-to-family conflict and drinking, or work-to-family conflict and exercise.

Finally, a number of quantitative studies have found no evidence of gender differences in the relationship between work-life imbalance and health, including poor self-assessed health, poor physical health, poor mental health, stress, lack of general well-being, lack of sleep quality, and deleterious health-related behaviours such as heavy alcohol use and substance dependence (Emslie et al., 2004; Frone, 2000; Frone et al., 1996; Grant-Vallone

& Donaldson, 2001; Grzywacz, 2000; He et al., 2002; Hunt & Annandale, 1993; Nylen et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2008; Winter et al., 2006).

Nylen and colleagues (2007) make an interesting point regarding the role of gender in the relationship between work-life balance and health in their study of women and men working in Sweden. Whilst they found no gender differences in the association between work-to-home and home-to-work interference and lack of sleep quality and poor self-rated health, they did find that time spent unwinding after work had a buffering effect on this relationship for women but not for men. The authors hypothesise that this was due to gender differences in coping mechanisms used to manage work-to-home interference. For example, they suggest that women are more likely to employ emotion-focused strategies whilst men used denial as a method of coping.

3.5.2. Gender, work-life balance and health: qualitative literature

Only two studies with a qualitative element examined gender differences in the relationship between work-life balance and health, both finding that gender norms had an impact on work-life balance on health. A study of employed parents in Australia (Bryson et al., 2007) found that demand overload was intensified by gender norms and social expectations such as being a ‘good’ mother and the dominance of male employment (a ‘good’ provider) in providing for the family. This, combined with consumption pressures, led to increased levels of stress and tiredness amongst participants. A study of immigrant Latino poultry workers in the United States (Grzywacz et al., 2007) found, whilst overall levels of work-family conflict were very low, women reported higher levels of conflict than men, with the physical demands of work contributing to women’s work-family conflict. The study found that these gender differences were partly due to the women having responsibility for the domestic sphere, and therefore the physical and emotional exhaustion caused by work had a greater impact on their family life.

3.6. Chapter summary

3.6.1. Summary of findings

The evidence surrounding the gendered nature of work-life balance is mixed. Quantitative studies have found support for both differences and similarities in women’s and men’s experiences of work-life balance. However, these findings are complicated by variations in samples. The qualitative literature shows evidence for gendered norms and expectations

both influencing and perpetuating women's and men's experiences of work-life intersections. Some evidence has been found for differences and similarities amongst women and amongst men, as well as between women and men. Socio-economic factors have also been found to impact on gender and work-life balance, with greater access to resources appearing to 'mute' some gender differences.

There is convincing quantitative and qualitative evidence for associations between work-life imbalance and poor health outcomes. Quantitative studies have indicated that the direction of conflict may be important. A small number of studies have also taken into account positive as well as negative interactions between paid work and other areas of life. The evidence regarding the relationship between gender, work-life balance and health is mixed.

3.6.2. Summary of types of study and gaps in the literature

The predominant methodology employed in studies examining gender differences in work-life balance, and links between work-life balance and health, was quantitative. There are relatively few qualitative studies in these areas, and very few examining the gendered nature of work-life balance and health. Most studies were located in the United States, so may not translate directly to a United Kingdom context. Many studies, particularly those using quantitative methods, use general population samples. This has led to problems with interpretation due to the gendered nature of the labour market. Of the studies sampling on the basis of shared occupation, or a single workplace, the majority have focused on professional, managerial and white-collar employment¹⁰. There is less research focusing on 'non-professional', lower paid occupations, such as manual and routine work, yet socio-economic factors has found to impact on experiences of work-life balance.

Studies of work-life balance have traditionally focused on the experiences of women. However, in recent years there has been an increase in samples involving both women and

¹⁰ There has been much discussion surrounding the various definitions work (for example, see Edgell, 2006; Grint, 2005). For the purposes of this study, 'professional' is used to mean an individual who has obtained a university degree and is working in a professional field, for example chemists, engineers and teachers (Office of National Statistics, 2009). Furthermore, the term usually implies that workers receive a 'comfortable' salary, benefit from a level of control over their working practices and are engaged in intellectually stimulating and creative work tasks. However, it should be recognised that there is a level of heterogeneity within any attempt to categorise occupations (Goldthorpe & Hope, 1974).

men, as is evidenced in this review. However, possibly due to assumptions about gender and work-life balance (Kilkey, 2006; Lewis & Campbell, 2007; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005; Wise & Bond, 2003), and/or recruitment issues, many of these samples still include proportionally more women than men.

On the basis of these findings, this thesis was a qualitative study, examining gender, work-life balance amongst women and men working in 'non-professional' jobs within a single organisation. More specifically, the study will examine three key research questions:

1. How do women and men in 'non-professional' occupations talk about their lived experiences of work-life balance?
2. How do women and men in 'non-professional' occupations refer to health in relation to their work-life balance?
3. Is there a gendered nature to participants' reports of work-life balance?

The next chapter outlines the design and methods employed to operationalise this study.

4. Chapter 4: Methods

This chapter describes the methodological approaches and processes that underpin the study. The study aimed to investigate how women and men in ‘non-professional’ occupations perceived and managed the balance between their work and their life outside work, how this impacted on their health, and what role gender played in this relationship. To achieve this, semi-structured qualitative interviews were carried out with forty women and men working in ‘non-professional’ jobs within a single organisation. Having established the aim of the study, the next challenge was to determine the study design, identifying which methods of data collection were appropriate to address the research questions (Blaikie, 2000). This chapter addresses this concern, outlining the practicalities involved in conducting the study, and issues that arose during the fieldwork process.

4.1. Scoping exercise

In order to understand the viewpoints of the study participants “it is necessary to master the everyday language that social actors use in dealing with the phenomenon under investigation, in short, to discover their ‘mutual knowledge’, the concepts, and the meanings associated with these concepts” (Blaikie, 2000: 251). Furthermore, King (1994) recommends “preliminary work such as unstructured discussions with people who have personal experience of the research area” (p.19). Therefore a short scoping exercise was undertaken.

Three target groups were identified in order to gain a range of perspectives on work-life balance and health; advisors at Economic Development Agencies, who had experience of working individuals seeking employment or trying to develop their skills; Human Resources (HR) managers, who had experience of the challenges and benefits work-life balance bring to companies; and Trades Union representatives, who had knowledge of issues raised by the employees they represent.

Meetings with nine respondents took the form of semi-structured interviews (for topic guides see appendix B, C, and D). As the meetings were intended to develop the objectives of the study and to gain a better understanding of work-life balance and health issues ‘on the ground’, it was decided not to record and analyse the interviews, but instead to take notes and reflect on the discussions.

Respondents were initially contacted by letter (appendix E). Following this, verbal consent was given by telephone, and at the beginning of each interview. Confidentiality was paramount, and the names of individuals and their organisations were removed from all notes. Contact details were kept in a separate locked cabinet from the interview notes. Ethical approval for the scoping exercise was granted by the University of Glasgow Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences ethics committee.

The scoping exercise raised a number of issues, particularly in relation to understandings of work-life balance in 'non-professional' occupations. Whilst all participants were aware of the concept, understandings of the phrase were very specific. The HR managers in particular appeared to equate work-life balance with flexible working policies and childcare. Both the perception and narratives about those who made use of work-life balance policies focused on those with caring responsibilities for children, mainly women, which in turn reinforced understandings of work-life balance policies being primarily for working mothers. Only one respondent, an Economic Development Agency, spoke about work-life balance in wider terms, highlighting the importance of health and lifestyle in relation to staff retention.

Work-life balance policies were mainly spoken about in relation to managerial, professional and administrative staff. It was recognised that it was often difficult to provide equitable policies to other staff because of their different working patterns and atypical working hours. This highlights the assumption that work-life balance is only applicable to certain types of office-based worker.

Income was highlighted as a major factor in relation to work-life balance, and more specifically, who can enjoy a work-life balance. Advisors at the Economic Development Agencies in particular reported income as being more important to their clients than work-life balance.

None of the respondents immediately associated work-life balance with health. When specifically questioned, interviewees spoke in general terms about healthy employees being better workers, and of ill-health being a barrier to work.

4.2. Methods for the main study

The key consideration when designing a research project is establishing which method is appropriate for the aim of the study (Jones, 1995; Silverman, 2005). There are strengths

and weaknesses to both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. Quantitative methods lend themselves to statistical summaries and comparisons of large numerical datasets (Lewin, 2005). Often underpinned by a positivist approach “based on the belief that phenomena can be reduced to their constituent parts, measured and then causal relationships deduced” (Baum, 1995: p.461), quantitative methods take a deductive approach to social research, often aiming to prove or disprove a hypothesis. Conversely, qualitative methods are underpinned by a phenomenological approach, where the theory emerges from the data, exploring research questions, and the questions of “how and why” (Power, 2002: p.87) are asked; qualitative methods aim to gain a greater understanding of individuals’ and societies’ actions and behaviours. By attempting to understand the experiences of actors through their own words (Baum, 1995; Power, 2002), qualitative methods can be used to tackle the “messy background noise” (Baum, 1995: p.459), the unquantifiable variables that are crucial in exploring how people view and make sense of their own world (Blaikie, 2000; Harding & Gantley, 1998).

Qualitative methods were also chosen due to the predominant use of quantitative methods by other researchers in examining the gendered nature of work-life balance, and links between work-life balance and health. Furthermore, the research questions were considered best answered through qualitative methods because of the exploratory, inductive nature of the study. It aimed to elicit detailed descriptions of ‘non-professional’ workers’ work-life balance (the ‘how and why’), drawing on their experiences rather than making assumptions about which work-life balance issues were important. Additionally, it was thought that examining perceptions of health amongst a predominately healthy working sample, and the subtle role gender may play in this relationship, were best addressed through a method which allowed participants to describe their thoughts and feelings in their own words.

The approach to designing, conducting, analysing and writing-up this thesis has been largely set within an interpretative framework. An interpretative approach is based on “the interpretation of interactions and the social meaning that people assign to their interactions [... it] believes that social meaning is created during interactions and by people’s interpretations of interactions” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006: p.78). My approach questions objectivity, or the existence of ‘truth’ within social reality, whilst attempting to situate the findings within the context of wider relational and structural contexts (Caproni, 2004), relating them to “practice, policy and decision making” (Gatrell, 2006) in order to address inequalities within society.

In order to fully integrate this approaches to the study, I aimed to explore participants' understandings and interpretations of their experiences of work-life balance and health. In doing so I adopted an intrinsic understanding of participants' ideas and reported experiences as being a product of their own socially situated experiences (Elliott, 2005; Oakley, 1974; Reid & Armstrong, accessed 2009) as opposed to objective 'facts'.

4.2.1. Reliability and validity in qualitative research

Numerous articles have been written regarding rigour in qualitative research, ranging from research design, to data collection and analysis (for example see Barbour, 2001; Blaxter, 2000; Keenan, Teijlingen, & Pitchforth, 2005; Mays & Pope, 1995; Mays & Pope, 2000; Power, 2002). Reliability is widely understood to mean "the replicability of research findings and whether or not they would be repeated if another study, using the same or similar methods, was undertaken" (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003: p.270), whereas validity is "the 'correctness' or 'precision' of a research reading" (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003: p.273).

Techniques such triangulation and respondent validation have been suggested as ways in which the researcher can improved the validity of their research (Mays & Pope, 2000). Yet the nature and diversity of qualitative research means that there is no 'one size fits all' solution to the question of rigour (Barbour, 2001; Mays & Pope, 2000); qualitative research cannot be reduced to what has been described as a 'cookbook' or formulaic approach (Barbour, 2001; Harding & Gantley, 1998). Rigour within qualitative research is essential to ensure that that the research is scientifically valid. The challenge is to find a middle ground between the formulaic approach of the checklist and the more pragmatic anthropological approach.

Rigour was ensured within this study by discussion of the transcripts and coding with my supervisors and colleagues. Furthermore, elements of framework analysis (Ritchie, Spencer, & O'Connor, 2003) were used, which allowed for transparency of analysis and identification of deviant cases. This issue is discussed in more depth within the analysis section, below.

4.2.2. The generalisability of qualitative research

The findings of a small, qualitative study are difficult to generalise to a wider population, due to the site and person-specific nature of each sample (Halford, 2006; Stockley & Daly, 1999). However, generalisability may be viewed as a flawed concept due to differing

social and economic structures that exist both across and within communities (Seale, 1999). Whilst this study does not purport to be generalisable to all women and men working in ‘non-professional’ occupations, by comparing the findings to other research on similar areas, this study gives insight into how study participants spoke about gender, work-life balance and health, and associations they made between the factors; it explores the nature of the phenomenon, not the prevalence (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). Furthermore, it begins to build an evidence base for this neglected group of employees.

4.3. Deciding where to carry out the study

Prior to beginning the research, a sampling framework was identified. I considered sampling from a community sample, drawn from an existing dataset such as the MRC Social & Public Health Science Unit’s longitudinal Twenty-07 Study¹¹ to examine work-life balance and health amongst workers who shared similar characteristics. This would have allowed me to sample people with specific characteristics such as family situation or working hours, or to compare respondents with similar or differing work-life conflict scores. However, there were not enough people of working age in ‘non-professional’ occupations who had not previously been sampled for qualitative research¹² to make the study viable. Also, it was felt that, as employment conditions potentially play an important role in work-life balance, sampling individuals who worked in different occupations would present analytical challenges regarding diversity of working experiences. Therefore I decided to sample people all working in the same or similar professions; a work based study.

¹¹ The Twenty-07 Study is a longitudinal study aiming to examine the social processes that produce and/or maintain inequalities in health (Twenty-07 Steering Group, 2005). The study was designed to examine critical points over the life-course, with three cohorts each twenty years apart being studied; those born in 1932 (aged 55 at the first sweep of study), 1952 (aged 35) and 1972 (aged 15). A series of home-based interviews and postal questionnaires were used over a twenty year period, meaning the study provides data covering sixty years of the life-course. Over 4000 people from the west coast of Scotland were involved in the initial wave of data collection, with a further four waves subsequently taking place.

¹² Twenty-07 protocol allows for respondents to be approached to take part in a subsidiary qualitative study on only one occasion. Several previous qualitative and mixed methods studies had previously sampled from the dataset (for example see Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Townsend, Wyke, & Hunt, 2008).

4.4. Gaining access to the sample

The experience of gaining access to a workplace and having to make adjustments to the research timetable, the study design and the sampling framework, are indicative of what has been described as “the quirkiness and messiness that social researchers experience” (Bryman, 1988: p.1). Research is rarely a straight forward process. Whilst it is crucial to have a well developed and planned research design (Blaikie, 2000), pragmatic decisions will often need to be made.

4.4.1. Contacting companies: initial experiences

Having decided to conduct the study in a work-based setting, the next challenge was to identify suitable organisations. As the aim of the study was to investigate how women and men in ‘non-professional’ occupations perceive and manage their work-life balance, a company which employed relatively equal numbers of women and men working in comparable jobs was sought. Initially it was decided to approach supermarkets that had several large stores in Glasgow. Supermarkets tend to employ a large number of people in ‘non-professional’ jobs, for example, shelf stackers and cashiers. Initially several supermarket chains were targeted, chosen for their share of the food retail market, the size of their stores, and the number of stores in Glasgow.

There is no simple formula for gaining access to a company for research purposes (Bryman, 1988). Following discussions with colleagues with experiences of organisational research, a short letter introducing the researcher and the study (appendix F) was sent to central Human Resources (HR) departments in the target companies, followed by a phone call a week later. This was found to be very time-consuming and unproductive. In one instance the same company was contacted twice by letter and five times by telephone over the course of a month. Eventually I was informed that the company did not participate in research as a matter of policy. In another instance I was put in contact with the Scottish office and had a seemingly very productive telephone meeting with the regional HR manager. However, despite sounding enthusiastic about the study, I was unable to contact this person again.

Further retail companies were identified and also sent a short information sheet explaining the practical implications and possible benefits from participating (appendix G) with the covering letter. However, again this strategy was unsuccessful.

4.4.2. Gaining access to 'ResearchOrg'

At this point in the recruitment process an Advisory Group meeting was held. One member of the group suggested I approach a professional contact who was a HR manager at a large research based organisation (referred to as 'ResearchOrg' to protect the identity of the company and individual participants). An initial e-mail received a quick and favourable response. The HR manager referred me to the Learning and Development Manager and, following further e-mail discussion outlining the practicalities of the study, my supervisor and I travelled to ResearchOrg head office. The meeting was very positive and approval was given for ResearchOrg's participation in the study, following the agreement of the Trades Union. It was agreed that employees in routine and manual occupations within the organisation (categorised for purposes of the research as 'administrative', 'manual' and 'technical' work; see chapter 5) would be approached to take part in the study

Following the initial meeting a number of issues arose. Firstly, the Trades Union representative raised a number of concerns. ResearchOrg was undergoing a centralisation and downsizing operation, leading to a number of administrative, manual and technical employees being offered early retirement or voluntary redundancy. It was agreed to only approach staff not at risk of redundancy. The second issue was that head office was not prepared to allow me to approach all administrative, manual and technical staff throughout the organisation as was initially hoped, but rather to approach each division individually. In some instances head office made direct contact with divisions on my behalf. In other cases head office introduced me to regional administrators who subsequently agreed in principle to me working with divisions within their region. The next stage varied. In some cases I contacted divisions individually, and in others the regional administrators made contact on my behalf. In total, I approached 19 divisions.

Whilst time consuming, with hindsight the process was positive as ResearchOrg was less centralised and more diverse than was initially understood. By approaching divisions individually, personal contacts with key 'gatekeepers' were made ensuring that individual divisions had a greater commitment to the study than if head office had insisted they take part.

4.4.3. Reflections on access

A number of lessons have been learnt from the experience of contacting companies to participate in research. Firstly, it provides support for Buchanan and colleague's (1988)

statement that “negotiating access to organizations for the purposes of research is a game of chance, not of skill” (p.56). Indeed, despite spending a considerable amount of time researching companies, writing letters and leaving messages with receptionists, it was ultimately through a colleague that access was negotiated.

Secondly, if carrying out research in a workplace setting in future without a personal introduction I would do so at a local level rather than contacting head offices as I did in the first instance. As this experience has demonstrated, the importance of a small number of enthusiastic supporters or ‘gatekeepers’ should not be underestimated.

Thirdly, I would emphasize from the onset why participating in the research may benefit the company. Feedback was offered to ResearchOrg which may have been helpful for training and staff development purposes. Whilst it was important that participating ResearchOrg divisions committed some time and resources to the study, for example by allowing staff to be interviewed during their working day, it was not felt the demands were too unwieldy.

Finally, I would be more explicit from the outset about the practical implications of taking part. Whilst academics are familiar with what is meant by ‘research’, this understanding is not necessarily held by the wider public, and may be perceived to be boring and even threatening (Buchanan et al., 1988). It is possible that the companies initially contacted viewed the study as a time-consuming exercise with little direct benefit. Outlining exactly what would be involved, for example the length of interviews, the type of questions to be asked and so on, may have demystified the process somewhat. Similarly, I would also reconsider how I explained the nature and reasoning behind qualitative methods. From the scoping exercise and initial conversations with companies, it became evident that many people understand research to mean a questionnaire. The concept of in-depth, qualitative interviews may be unusual to many people, with some people perceiving them as being less scientific and more intrusive than questionnaires. I would therefore carefully consider how I expressed this in all communications.

4.5. Overview of ResearchOrg

ResearchOrg is a large, publicly funded, research based organisation. It is made up of a number of ‘divisions’ based mainly in Britain. Each division has a specific remit, and varies in size. The divisions involved in this study were primarily engaged in biological, wet-laboratory, based research.

ResearchOrg employs a range of staff in managerial, research and support roles. For this study people in ‘non-professional’ occupations (classified as administrative, manual and technical) were interviewed. The majority of work-based work-life balance studies sample from managerial and professional occupations. Thus this study is unusual in that it samples people working in ‘non-professional’, low paid¹³, jobs.

The number of administrative, manual and technical staff at each division varied, depending on the function of the division. However, as I was unable to obtain figures for the total number of employees who worked in each category, it was not possible to assess the representativeness of either the survey or interview participants.

All ResearchOrg staff were entitled to the same annual, parental, sick leave and ‘family friendly’ entitlements, regardless of whether they worked in professional or ‘non-professional’ jobs or length of service.

4.5.1. ResearchOrg’s work-life balance related policies

ResearchOrg had a number of work-life balance related policies in place. These included:

- Employees who had worked for ResearchOrg for 26 weeks or more were entitled to request flexible working arrangements, including part-time hours, job sharing, working from home and career breaks, in line with statutory obligations.
- All pregnant employees were entitled to 52 weeks maternity leave, regardless of length of time worked for ResearchOrg. During the first 26 weeks of this period their normal terms and conditions of employment should be maintained, except pay. During the second 26 weeks only certain terms applied. All women were entitled to time off with pay for antenatal care. Employees who had worked for ResearchOrg for 26 weeks at the fifteenth week before their baby was due were eligible for statutory maternity pay for 39 weeks, in line with the 2007 Work and Families Act. Employees who had worked for ResearchOrg for one year were entitled to 26 weeks fully paid leave and a

¹³ Salaries of participants varied, with the majority earning between £12,508 and £16,9555, and a small number earning up to £20,027 due to working for ResearchOrg for a long time. For comparative purposes, the median pay for all workers in the UK in 2007 was £20,000 (Office of National Statistics, 2007); for administrative workers it was £15,474; for process workers (roughly comparable to the manual and technical workers in this sample) it was £20,032. All participants received their salaries monthly.

further 13 weeks of statutory maternity pay, which was more than was stipulated by government legislation.

- Employees with legal paternal responsibilities who had worked for ResearchOrg for one year were entitled to 10 days fully paid paternity leave. This is more than the statutory requirements, which entitled employees with paternity responsibilities to 10 days statutory paternity pay (£108.85 a week or 90% of their average weekly earnings).
- Employees with the primary care responsibilities for the adopted child who had worked for ResearchOrg for 26 weeks were entitled to 39 weeks paid adoptive leave and a further 13 weeks unpaid leave. If an employee was not the primary carer of the adopted child they were entitled to the equivalent of paid paternity leave. As for maternity and paternity leave, this is in excess of statutory obligations.
- Time off to deal with domestic incidents (for example, the death or funeral of a close relative, serious illness of a dependent or time to deal with the immediate effects of a burglary).
- In line with the 1999 Parental Leave Directive, unpaid leave to deal with family incidents, for example, time to deal with the unexpected disruption of care arrangements, such as a home nurse cancelling, or an unexpected school closure. In addition to this statutory obligation, employees could also be granted unpaid leave to deal with domestic incidents, for example, long-term care of an elderly relative or attending the funeral of a friend or relative.
- Making up approved time off which cannot be dealt with outside normal working hours (for example, moving house, gas/electricity appointments).

All flexible working options not required by law are at the manager's discretion. The policy specifically states that some forms of flexibility such as working from home or 'making up time' may not be appropriate for all roles within the organisation.

4.6. Screening questionnaire

As is noted by Buchanan and colleagues (1988) in their work on gaining access to organisations, "once research access to an organization has been negotiated successfully, it then becomes necessary constantly to renegotiate access to the lives and experiences of the individual members of that organization" (p.59). The first stage of the study was a short screening questionnaire. It was primarily used as a way of recruiting volunteers to take part

in the main qualitative study. The questionnaire gave potential participants an idea of the areas to be covered in the interview. It was also felt that staff would be more likely to agree to take part in an interview following a questionnaire that they had voluntarily returned, as opposed to receiving a letter inviting them to take part in an interview with no prior engagement.

The data gathered from the questionnaire were a potential way of sampling interview participants on the basis of personal characteristics, for example if they had children living with them, or the number of hours they worked. Finally, the questionnaire data were used to produce a report for ResearchOrg, thereby providing an incentive to participate.

4.6.1. Questionnaire content

The questionnaire can be seen in appendix H. The first section concerned respondents' experiences and opinions of their paid employment. Questions 1 to 4 asked about respondents' employment at ResearchOrg, location of work, pay-scale and length of time employed by the organisation. As ResearchOrg had no centrally agreed definition of job titles across the organisation, this question was left open-ended, with the responses coded at a later date. Questions 5 to 7 concerned working hours. Questions 8 and 9 related to factors considered when looking for a job and how respondents rated their job at ResearchOrg. These questions were designed by the research team (my supervisors and me) following a request from ResearchOrg head office to investigate. They included pay, interest in work, career development opportunities, and job security. Question 10 was a standard job satisfaction measure (for further discussion of job satisfaction and job quality measures, see Kalleberg & Vaisey, 2005).

The next section related to respondents' personal lives. It was decided to include these questions at this later stage as it was felt respondents would feel more comfortable answering questions about work first, as they had been contacted at the workplace. Questions 11 to 15 concerned demographic information including sex, year of birth, and family situation. Question 16, regarding ethnic group, was taken from the 'Determinants of Adolescent Social well-being and Health' (DASH) Study as opposed to the standard census question on ethnicity as it was felt it took into account greater breadth of ethnic diversity (DASH, 2003/4).

The penultimate section concerned work-life balance. Questions 17 and 18 were scales designed to measure work-family and family-work conflict, and were adapted from a study

of conflict between work and home in Finland, Japan and the UK (Chandola et al., 2004). Question 19 aimed to assess levels of positive spillover between domains, and was drawn from a study of work-family strains and gains amongst two earner couples (Marshall & Barnett, 1993).

The final section (questions 21 to 23) related to health issues, and included standard questions relating to self-assessed health (Blaxter, 1987), malaise symptoms (Cox, Blaxter, & Buckle, 1987), and disability (General Register Office for Scotland, 2003).

The back page of the questionnaire contained a form which respondents could complete if they wished to take part in a further qualitative interview. In the accompanying text it was emphasised that the interview was a crucial part of the study, and the importance of volunteers taking part. It was hoped this emphasis would encourage respondents to complete the form.

An information leaflet about the study (appendix I) accompanied the questionnaire. Both the questionnaire and leaflet were printed on pale yellow paper. The questionnaire and leaflet were sent in a sealed envelope containing a pre-paid envelope addressed to the survey room at the MRC SPHSU and a small pen. The pen was enclosed to make the questionnaire easier for respondents to complete and as a small incentive for completing the questionnaire.

4.6.2. Data storage: Questionnaires

A database containing the ID numbers and details of respondents were kept on a password secured PC by the MRC SPHSU Survey Office. Completed questionnaires were returned directly to the Survey Office and logged in the database. Questionnaires were stored in a locked cabinet by the Survey Office, and were kept separately from the database and SPSS dataset.

If respondents completed the form on the back page of the questionnaire indicating they were interested in being interviewed, the form was removed by the Survey Office, details entered into the database, and then the form was destroyed.

4.6.3. Pilot screening questionnaire

The questionnaire was piloted in a small division in Scotland. Nine questionnaire packs were sent out to named respondents, and four were returned. All the respondents were female and worked in administrative jobs. They all worked standard hours (no overtime,

no unpaid hours, and no atypical hours). Of the respondents, only one person agreed to be interviewed. Following the pilot screening questionnaire no changes were made to the content of the questionnaire. However, the layout of the information leaflet and front page of the questionnaire were changed to make them more attractive and easy to read.

4.6.4. Main screening questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered by the Survey Office at the MRC SPHSU. Each questionnaire had an identification number and barcode sticker on the front page. This was linked to a database entry which contained the work address and, when known, name of the employee. When a questionnaire was returned it was logged in the database. If the respondent had volunteered to take part in an interview the personal details provided were entered into the database. I entered the data into SPSS, and then data entries were independently checked by the Survey Office and reception staff at the MRC SPHSU.

As with contacting ResearchOrg divisions, the process of contacting individuals within divisions varied. Some divisions provided us with the names of relevant staff so they could be contacted directly at their work address (23%), whereas others distributed the screening questionnaire themselves (77%). In these instances the divisions provided us with the number of relevant employees and I provided them with sealed questionnaire packs which they then distributed. One problem with this method of contacting participants was that I was not able to keep an accurate record of the response rate, nor was I able to send reminders directly to staff who had not responded.

A reminder pack was sent to all employees who had not responded to the initial questionnaire three weeks after the initial contact. In divisions where the names of employees were not known, the division distributed the reminder packs on my behalf. These packs contained a note asking respondents to ignore the letter if they had already responded to the questionnaire in the first instance.

4.6.5. Main screening questionnaire overview

Questionnaires were distributed across 19 divisions in Scotland and England (308). 147 were returned, giving a response rate of 48%, with 146 of the responses being valid. However, response rates by sex or job type could not be calculated as the demographics of all potential questionnaire respondents were not known.

A summary report of the questionnaire data was prepared for ResearchOrg by my supervisor and myself (Gurney, Emslie, & Macintyre, 2007a), and a shortened report was prepared and distributed to respondents and participating divisions (Gurney, Emslie, & Macintyre, 2007b). Further details of the questionnaire data are presented in the next chapter.

The intention of administering a screening questionnaire was to provide feedback to ResearchOrg, and recruit volunteers to take part in the study (42% (n = 61) of respondents volunteered to take part in an interview, of which 39% were male and 61% female). The main requirement for sampling for the qualitative element of the study was to have an equal number of men and women to interview, which was achievable from the sample. However, due to the comparatively small number of men who volunteered to be interviewed, it was not possible to sample on any other basis, for example if the respondent had a child living with them, or by age. I therefore aimed to recruit a diverse sample, with equal numbers of women and men.

4.7. Qualitative interviews

One-to-one interviews are the most widely used method in qualitative organisational research (King, 1994), but this does not mean they should be the default method. The aim of this study was to investigate how employees in ‘non-professional’ occupations perceive and manage the balance between their work and their life outside work. Focus groups did not seem an appropriate method to explore employees’ individual experiences, particularly as the study took place in the workplace and participants may not have felt comfortable sharing intimate experiences with colleagues. Individual interviews were therefore used as the main mode of investigation.

4.7.1. The interview guide and reflections on the process

Rather than using a formal schedule of questions, the qualitative research interview uses an interview guide which outlines topics or areas the researcher should cover over the course of the interview (King, 1994). In order to identify the areas to cover in the interviews a three-pronged approach of reviewing the literature, directly contacting relevant researchers to view copies of interview guides, and discussions with supervisors and colleagues was used. Four broad areas were identified: paid employment, home, leisure, and work-life balance issues (appendix J).

The interview began with some practical questions about paid employment; as participants had been contacted through their workplace this seemed a 'safe' area to begin with. Whilst the questions about work were fairly structured, the questions about home life were intentionally more general in recognition of the variety in home and family situations.

A decision was made not use the phrase 'work-life balance' throughout the interview as it was felt it had a number of connotations. However, a specific question was asked towards the end of the interview to see if respondents were familiar with the phrase, and if so, what they understood it to mean.

4.7.2. Preparation for the interviews

Initially participants were contacted using the details provided on the form from the questionnaire. In the majority of instances this was by e-mail, followed by telephone a few days later, or by telephone if no e-mail address was provided. Following agreement of a date and time to meet I contacted the division to book a room. Participants would then be contacted again to confirm the room we were meeting in.

Before each interview a participant summary grid was completed (appendix K) containing data from the questionnaire such as job title, family situation, and self-assessed health. Before each interview the information was reviewed to ensure I had a basic knowledge of the individual so specific questions could be asked if necessary. Whilst this was found to be useful preparation, the grid was rarely referred to in the interviews due to inconsistencies found in the data. For example, one participant reported that he had three children living with him in the questionnaire, yet in the interview reported only living with two children. In another instance a participant reported having no children in the questionnaire, yet spoke about his nine-year-old son, with whom he lived, in the interview. Whilst I did not question any participant directly about these discrepancies, two of the interviewees spoke unprompted about completing the questionnaire. One told me at the end of the interview not to rely too much on what he wrote in the questionnaire as he had filled it in late at night. Another participant said that he had assumed it was another consultation document from head office, and had not expected to be contacted further.

4.7.3. Consent, confidentiality and recording

At the beginning of each interview participants were given an information leaflet (appendix L) which described how the study aimed to explore "men's and women's

experiences of juggling work and other aspects of their life, and how this impacts on their health.” The format of the interview was explained, as were issues of confidentiality. Any concerns or questions were addressed. Whilst I did not inform divisions which members of staff would be participating in the study, the interviews were carried out in the workplace, so confidentiality was a concern. The majority of participants chose to ask permission from their line-managers to meet with me during working hours, others came during their lunch-break, or before or after work.

Participants were asked to read and sign a consent form (appendix E) agreeing to take part in the interview, for the interview to be recorded, and acknowledging what the data may be used for.

4.7.4. Pilot interviews

Three pilot interviews (Alice, Becky, and Colin¹⁴) were carried out in Scotland in order to test the interview guide and my interview technique. A number of issues arose in the pilot interviews. Firstly, health was a challenging area to explore in the interview context. When questioned directly about health, participants talked mainly about physical complaints. For example, Becky spoke about having sore eyes when she worked for a long time at a computer, and Colin reported being tested for radiation levels due to working in an animal house. Alice spoke of health in a broader sense, describing how she found the social aspect of work to be beneficial to her mental health as she did not have many opportunities to meet other adults due to being a single parent. However, participants did mention health issues, both directly and indirectly, throughout their interviews. For example, Colin described how his constant worry about his elderly parents affected him at work. In a previous year he had been contacted at work as his father had been taken into hospital, and consequently felt anxious whenever he heard the telephone ring.

Secondly, the diversity of family situation was reflected in the pilot interviews. Alice described her home life largely being structured around her childrens’ school and extra-curricular timetable. However, for Becky and Colin, who did not have young children living with them, it was harder to explore different aspects of their home lives. Their lives were not as clearly structured by having to provide and care for other people, and therefore they described having more time for relaxation and leisure. Conversely, Alice spoke of

¹⁴ All participants’ names are pseudonyms.

having very little time to relax at home, and her social life was largely focused around her work colleagues. Furthermore, all three participants spoke about the important role their parents played in their lives, both in relation to concern when an elderly parent had fallen ill, and in a more positive way of assisting with housework.

At the end of each interview participants were asked what they thought of when they heard the phrase 'work-life balance'. Initially the responses appeared fairly standardised, describing trying to achieve the 'right' balance between work and family life. For example, Alice stated:

“You have to have the right balance so you don't live to work but at the same time you don't work to live.”

(Alice, 45, lived with 2 primary school aged children, admin, part-time)

However, when probed the narrative became more individual. For example, Becky spoke of how she felt many people were “stressed out” by combining full-time work and family life, in particular women:

“At the weekend women are so tired. She's catching up with the washing, ironing, cooking, cleaning and then the weekends gone. It tends to be a vicious circle.”

(Becky, 48, lived with adult child, admin, part-time)

Whilst this question was well received by both Becky and Alice, Colin responded differently. The question initially confused him, and I had to explain what I meant by work-life balance, thereby defeating the aim of the question which was to see how he interpreted the phrase. This presented an awkward situation; Colin appeared flustered as he didn't understand what was being asked of him, and I was flustered as I hadn't anticipated him not understanding. This instance led me to consider the use of assumed knowledge throughout the interview. By using what was believed to be a commonly recognised phrase, I had assumed that participants would have heard the phrase before and have some opinion on its relevance to their lives. However, I had not considered a situation where a participant would not share this assumed knowledge. On this occasion I felt that the confusion reinforced the class and educational difference between Colin and myself, leading me to consider how I would both present the question and handle a similar situation in future interviews.

One of the benefits of conducting pilot interviews is the experience gained by the interviewer. As a new qualitative researcher, I felt I became more confident throughout the interviews. In the first interview the questions I asked were not always very clear, and on a number of occasions I made unnecessary comments which may have unduly influenced the direction of participants' narratives. However, in the majority of cases participants appeared happy to answer all the questions when asked, and thus my interruptions were unnecessary.

Whilst no changes were made to the interview guide following the pilot interviews, the process allowed me to develop my interview skills and establish which areas may have needed extra probing, in particular health. It also reinforced an awareness of diversity amongst the sample, and to be aware of using assumed knowledge or phrases. As no changes were made to the interview guide following the pilot interviews, these participants were analysed as part of the main sample.

4.7.5. The main interviews: sampling

The usable interview sample consisted of forty people (19 men and 21 women; a further two people were interviewed but the recordings could not be transcribed due to poor sound quality) employed by ResearchOrg in administrative, manual and technical jobs. The age range was from 21 to 70 (table 18), with the majority of men being over 45 and the majority of women being under 45 years of age. The majority were based at ResearchOrg divisions in the south of England, with a small number being located in Scotland.

4.8. Administrative, manual and technical workers within ResearchOrg

In order to protect anonymity whilst still providing some context to the findings, participants' jobs were grouped into three broad categories: administrative, manual and technical (table 1). As is the case in the UK labour market overall, job types were largely segregated by sex; the administrative workers were all female, as were the majority of technical workers (10 women, 3 men). Conversely, all but one of the manual employees was male (16 men, 1 woman). Thus, within this study gender and job type were inextricably linked; the men were almost all manual workers, and the women almost always administrative or technical workers.

Table 1. Type of job in which interview participants worked

	ALL	MEN	WOMEN
Administrative	10	0	10
Manual	17	16	1
Technical	13	3	10

Administrative employees worked as personal assistants (2), in human resources (2), doing clerical duties such as paperwork, filing, typing and data entry (4), library work (1) and a receptionist (1). The manual jobs were maintenance (2), porter and stores work (9), cleaning (2), and security (4). Of the technical employees, six were animal technicians, responsible for the everyday care and health of the animals kept for research purposes. Four people worked in glassware, cleaning and preparing apparatus for the scientists. Two people worked as media pourers, which involved mixing various chemicals and solutions for researchers. One person stood out as being different from the other technical workers, being a university student working for a year as a research assistant.

4.9. Analysis

Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and downloaded to a password protected PC. Field-notes were taken immediately following each interview, anonymised and stored on a password protected PC. Following each interview I listened to the recording to check for sound quality. On my return to the MRC SPHSU copies were put onto a password protected PC. All paper notes and interview grids were shredded. Consent forms were kept separately from other data and records in a secure cabinet.

The documents were transcribed by a local transcription company. I then checked each transcript for accuracy and to complete sections of the interview they were unable to transcribe. Participants were given pseudonyms and any identifying data such as names and places were suitably anonymised. A short summary grid was placed at the top of each transcript containing the participant's pseudonym, biographical and work-related information such as family situation, age and job type, and any other notes of interest.

A thematic analytical approach was adopted. Transcripts were read and a short 'potted biography' was produced for each participant. This contained a summary of the key themes

and quotes arising in each interview. Potted biographies were typically between two and four pages long, and where possible used direct quotes from participants in order to remain true to the essence of the interview. Following this process the biographies were discussed with my supervisors, and six broad themes or ‘codes’ were identified: paid employment, home and family life, leisure, work-life balance, identity, and health.

A ‘two-tiered’ approach to coding was adopted in order to make the transcripts more manageable to analyse in a systematic fashion. Initially all transcripts were entered into the qualitative data analysis software package, NVivo, and then coded using the six broad themes identified above. Rigour is an essential component of qualitative research (Barbour, 2001; Blaxter, 2000; Mays & Pope, 1995), and therefore transcripts and themes were discussed with my supervisors throughout the coding period in order to ensure validity of the process. Following this first stage, each of the six themes were coded in more detail in order to establish the individual themes relating to each area. For example, the paid employment theme was sub-coded into a number of areas including hours of work, annual leave, and relationships with colleagues.

Following the coding of the transcripts, six descriptive documents were written regarding each of the six broad themes. These documents were written by extracting each of the ‘sub-codes’ from the transcripts to establish what had been said about each subject area and by who. This process was informed by framework analysis, a “matrix based method for ordering and synthesising data” (Ritchie et al., 2003: p.219). For some sub-codes, tables or ‘thematic charts’ were created, summarising what each participant said about the area, using the participant’s original language where possible. This allowed for comparisons to be made between participants. I found this process particularly useful for beginning to analyse the data by participants’ characteristics, such as sex, age, job type and family situation, and to identify deviant cases.

The next stage involved considering the descriptive documents, in particular the main themes, comparisons and anomalies arising from them, in order to begin to develop ideas and explanations emerging from the data. This process involved discussion with my supervisors, returning to the theoretical and empirical literature surrounding the area of gender, work-life balance and health, and constant questioning of the data. The results of this analysis are presented in the following chapters.

4.10. Ethical approval

Ethical approval for the fieldwork was granted by the University of Glasgow Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences ethics committee.

5. Chapter 5: Quantitative findings from the postal questionnaire

In order to recruit participants for the qualitative interviews, a short postal questionnaire was distributed to administrative, manual and technical staff at several ResearchOrg divisions. The findings are presented in this chapter to give some context to the qualitative study.

5.1. Overview of the questionnaire sample

The questionnaire sample comprised 146 people; 94 women (64%) and 52 men (36%) sampled from 19 ResearchOrg divisions across Britain. The sample was evenly split between those aged 45 and younger (48%; table 2) and those aged over 45 (52%). Men were, on average, slightly older than women (mean age 46 years compared to 42 years).

Table 2. Age of respondents¹⁵

	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
< 26	19.	13.1	6	11.5	13	14.0
26-35	28	19.3	4	7.7	24	25.8
36-45	22	15.2	10	19.2	12	12.9
46-55	41	28.3	17	32.7	24	25.8
56-65	34	23.4	15	28.9	19	20.4
66+	1	0.7	0	0	1	1.1

The vast majority (90%) of the sample described themselves as ‘White’ (table 3). The remaining respondents indicated they were ‘Black’ (5%), ‘Asian’ (4%) or from ‘Mixed Background’ (1%)¹⁶. Male respondents were more ethnically diverse than female.

¹⁵ NB: tables all use valid data. However, there was very little missing data.

¹⁶ A detailed measure of ethnicity was used in the questionnaire, taken from the MRC SPHSU Determinants of Adolescent Social well-being and Health study (DASH, 2003/4), as opposed to the standard census

Table 3. Ethnicity of respondents

	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
White UK	113	77.4	35	67.3	78	83.0
White other	19	13.0	8	15.4	11	11.7
Mixed background	1	0.7	1	1.9	0	0
Asian	6	4.1	3	5.8	3	3.2
Black	7	4.8	5	9.6	2	2.1

Around half (55%) of the sample reported living with a spouse or partner (table 4) and one third (32%) had children living with them at home (table 5). Twelve percent of the sample reported providing regular care for sick, elderly or disabled adults (table 6). There were no significant gender differences in respect of any of these factors.

Table 4. Proportion of respondents who reported currently living with a spouse or partner

	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Partner	80	54.8	26	50.0	54	57.4
No partner	66	45.2	26	50.0	40	42.6

question on ethnicity (General Register Office for Scotland, 2003), as it was felt it took into account greater breadth of ethnic diversity. However, due to the small number of respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds, the results were grouped as detailed in table 2.

Table 5. Proportion of respondents who reported currently living with children under 18yrs

	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Child < 5 years	7	4.8	2	3.8	5	5.3
Child 5 years +	39	26.7	13	25.0	26	27.7
No children living with them	100	68.5	37	71.2	63	67.0

Table 6. Proportion of respondents who report regularly caring or helping sick, elderly or disabled adults

	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Care	18	12.3	6	11.5	12	12.8
No care	128	87.7	46	88.5	82	87.2

5.2. Paid work and job satisfaction

As expected, there were gender differences in the distribution of the sample by type of job (table 7). Almost all the men worked in manual (62%) and technical jobs (36%). In contrast, most women were concentrated in technical (56% of women) or administrative roles (43%).

Table 7. Type of job in which respondents worked

	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Admin	39	28.3	1	2.0	38	43.2
Manual	32	23.2	31	62.0	1	1.1
Technical	67	48.6	18	36.0	49	55.7

Women were also more likely to work part-time¹⁷ than men; over one third (35%) of women worked fewer than 36 hours per week compared to only 14% of men (table 8). Women who had caring responsibilities (children or responsibility for an elderly or sick adult) were more likely to work part-time than men in a similar position (54% of women who had caring responsibilities worked part-time compared to only 5% of men; table 9).

Table 8. Standard hours worked per week by respondents

	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1-20 hrs	17	12.1	3	6.1	14	15.4
21-35	22	15.7	4	8.2	18	19.8
36 hrs +	101	72.1	42	85.7	59	64.8

Table 9. Proportion of respondents who worked full- (36 hours +) and part-time (< 36 hours), by caring responsibilities (children at home and/or provide care for a sick or elderly adult)

		ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Caring responsibilities	Part-time	21	36.8	1	5.0	20	54.1
	Full-time	36	63.2	19	95.0	17	45.9
No caring responsibilities	Part-time	18	21.7	6	20.7	12	22.2
	Full-time	65	78.3	23	79.3	42	77.8

Respondents had worked for ResearchOrg for an average of 7 years. Around one third reported working hours outside the ‘normal’ working week (early mornings before 8am, evenings after 7pm, or weekend work; table 10). Working ‘atypical’ hours was most

¹⁷ Full-time work for respondents = 36 hours per week; part-time work = <36 hours per week.

common among manual (42% of whom reported this) and technical (40%) workers, and least common among administrative workers (3%).

Table 10. Proportion of respondents who reported normally working atypical hours (before 8am, after 7pm or at weekends)

	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
‘Atypical’ hours	43	29.7	20	39.2	23	24.5
‘Normal’ hours	101	69.7	31	60.8	70	74.5

Overall, around three quarters (77%) of respondents reported they were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with their job (table 11). Respondents were asked to rate variable aspects of their current job with ResearchOrg (table 12). They were most positive about holidays, working with friendly people, interest in their job, location, pension, and job security. However, only around half rated flexible working (56%), pay (49%), and training opportunities (48%) favourably, and only one-third (32%) thought that career development was ‘good’ or ‘very good’ at ResearchOrg.

Table 11. Job satisfaction reported by respondents

	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
‘Very satisfied’ / ‘satisfied’	112	76.7	38	73.1	74	78.7
‘Quite satisfied’ / ‘not very satisfied’	34	23.3	14	26.9	20	21.3

Table 12. Proportion (%) of respondents who rated each factor ‘very good’ or ‘good’ in respect of their current job (ranked from best to worst)

	ALL	MEN	WOMEN
Holidays	94.5	88.5	97.8
Friendly people	89.6	82.7	93.5
Interest in job	76.2	68.6	80.4
Location	75.9	73.1	77.4
Pension	71.0	63.5	75.3
Job security	69.9	58.8	76.1
Flexible working	55.6	38.5	65.2
Pay	49.3	38.5	55.4
Training	48.3	35.3	55.4
Career development	31.5	29.4	32.6

Interestingly, substantial proportions did not rate flexible working, pensions, career development, or training at all, but indicated on the questionnaire that it was ‘not applicable’ to them. Men were more likely than women to consider all of these factors to be ‘not applicable’. Perhaps unsurprisingly, due to the high proportion of respondents without children living with them (69%; table 5), 60% of respondents indicated that maternity or paternity leave was ‘not applicable’ to them. Of those that did rate it (n=54), 72% indicated it was ‘good’ or ‘very good’.

With the exception of pensions, women rated every factor more positively than men; these gender differences were particularly pronounced for holidays, friendly people, training opportunities, pay, and flexible working.

Respondents were also asked to rate the same characteristics as if they were looking for a job (table 13). They considered interest in job, pay, friendly people, job security, location of workplace, and holidays to be most important. Over half also took into account pension, training opportunities, flexible working and career development prospects. Of those who considered maternity or paternity leave applicable to them, 39% thought this to be

important or a very important factor. Women were more likely than men to consider working with friendly people, a good location, training opportunities, and flexible working as important factors when looking for a job.

Table 13. Proportion (%) of respondents who considered each factor ‘very important’ or ‘important’ when looking for a job (ranked from most to least)

	ALL	MEN	WOMEN
Interest in job	91.5	84.3	95.6
Pay	90.3	90.4	90.3
Friendly people	88.3	78.8	93.5
Job security	85.4	80.8	88.0
Location	84.0	74.5	89.2
Holidays	73.1	75.0	72.0
Flexible working	57.4	39.2	67.8
Pension	69.2	72.5	67.4
Training	61.1	48.1	68.5
Career development	58.7	53.8	61.5

It is informative to compare how respondents rated the factors important when looking for a job with how they rated these same factors in relation to their job at ResearchOrg. A deficit in these ratings was found for pay. That is, 90% of both women and men rated pay as important when seeking a new job, while only 55% of women and 39% of men rated it as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ in ResearchOrg (a 35% gap for women and a 51% gap for men). Large gaps were also found for career development (a gap of 29% for women and 25% for men), job security (a gap of 12% and 22% respectively), interest in job (a gap of 15% for both women and men), and training opportunities (a gap of 14% and 13% respectively).

5.3. Work-life balance

Survey respondents were asked to complete a scale in order to indicate the extent to which their job responsibilities conflicted with their family life and vice versa. Scores ranged from 4 (very low conflict) to 12 (very high conflict). The mean score for work-to-family

conflict (e.g. ‘problems at work make you irritable at home’, and ‘your job reduces the amount of time you can spend with your family’; table 14) was 5.7 and for family-to-work conflict (e.g. ‘family worries or problems distract you from your work’, and ‘family obligations reduce the time you need to relax or be by yourself’; table 15) was 5.2. These scores were lower than those reported in a study of white-collar workers in the UK civil service (Chandola et al., 2004), suggesting that respondents in administrative, manual and technical jobs at ResearchOrg experienced less conflict. No significant differences were found by gender for either the work-to-family or the family-to-work conflict scores.

Table 14. Overall work-to-family conflict score for respondents (extent to which job responsibilities interfere with family life)

	ALL	MEN	WOMEN	T-TEST
Mean	5.7	5.8	5.6	0.538

Table 15. Overall family-to-work conflict score for respondents (extent to which family life and responsibilities interfere with job)

	ALL	MEN	WOMEN	T-TEST
Mean	5.2	5.0	5.4	0.160

5.4. Health

Most respondents (86%) described their health as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ (table 16). Parents were more likely to report their health was ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ than those without children. With regards to mental health, around one-third of respondents said they always felt tired (35%), or had difficulty sleeping (31%), while around one-quarter described worrying ‘over every little thing’ or having difficulty concentrating (table 17). Only 8% described themselves as suffering from ‘nerves’. Women were more likely than men to report difficulty concentrating. Administrative and technical workers were more likely than manual workers to report worrying ‘over every little thing’.

Table 16. Respondents' self assessed health over the last 12 months

	ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Excellent	41	28.1	18	34.6	23	24.5
Good	84	57.5	30	57.7	54	57.4
Fair	17	11.6	4	7.7	13	13.8
Poor	3	2.1	0	0.0	3	3.2

Table 17. Proportion of respondents who reported experiencing mental health symptoms in the last month

		ALL		MEN		WOMEN	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Difficulty sleeping	Yes	42	30.9	13	26.5	29	33.3
	No	94	69.1	36	73.5	58	66.7
Nerves	Yes	11	8.2	2	4.1	9	10.6
	No	123	91.8	47	95.9	76	89.4
Always feeling tired	Yes	49	34.8	16	31.4	33	36.7
	No	92	65.2	35	68.6	57	63.3
Difficulty concentrating	Yes	31	22.8	7	14.3	24	27.6
	No	105	77.2	42	85.7	63	72.4
Worrying over every little thing	Yes	36	26.1	9	18.0	27	30.7
	No	102	73.9	41	82.0	61	69.3

Twelve percent of the questionnaire sample described themselves as having a disability. Women were more likely to report this than men (15% compared to 6%), and administrative workers were more likely to report this than technical and manual workers (21%, 12% and 3% respectively).

5.5. Chapter summary

The questionnaire data indicate that respondents had reasonably good levels of job satisfaction and health. In comparison to a study of white collar workers in the UK civil service (Chandola et al., 2004), the work-life conflict scores from the ResearchOrg questionnaire sample were lower. Whilst this may indicate overall lower levels of conflict or imbalance, it may also mean that people working in ‘non-professional’ occupations experience and report conflict in a different way to those in professional jobs. This is an area which is explored within later findings chapters.

It should be remembered that since I did not have denomination data (numbers or characteristics of non-professional staff working at ResearchOrg) I have no way of assessing the response rate or response biases in relation to the questionnaire and therefore the generalisability of these responses to other staff at ResearchOrg.

6. Chapter 6: The qualitative interview participants

This chapter presents an overview of the 40 qualitative interview participants. Participants were sampled on the basis of working in administrative, manual and technical jobs, but came from a range of backgrounds, some of which may be considered surprising for the ‘non-professional’ nature of the work being undertaken. This chapter presents evidence of this diversity, as well as some of the similarities within the sample. Furthermore, some important gendered aspects of the sample are underlined, in particular relating to job type.

The chapter begins by presenting an overview of the demographics of participants. It then moves on to describe their domestic situations and working hours. Next it outlines how participants spoke about ResearchOrg policies in relation to annual leave and sick leave. It then examines how participants described diversity and interest in their work, followed by the reasons given for being in their current job and participants’ career trajectories. Following this it examines previous employment and future work plans. Finally, this chapter addresses issues of identity at work.

6.1. The qualitative sample

The interview sample consisted of forty people (19 men and 21 women) employed by ResearchOrg in administrative, manual and technical jobs. The age range was from 21 to 70 (table 18), with the majority of men being over 45 and the majority of women being under 45 years of age.

Table 18. Age of interview participants

	ALL	MEN	WOMEN
< 26	3	0	3
26-35	7	2	5
36-45	10	5	5
46-55	11	8	3
56-65	8	4	4
66+	1	0	1

In addition to their work with ResearchOrg, five people reported having second jobs (3 men, 2 women), and a further five were engaged in some form of study (3 men, 2 women). Of these, seven were in full-time and three in part-time work with ResearchOrg.

6.2. Domestic situations

Participants had a diverse range of living situations; fourteen had offspring living at home (table 19), eighteen lived with a partner or spouse, seven lived with parents, eight alone, one with other family members, and two with friends. Eighteen people lived with a partner or spouse (10 women, 8 men). A further seven lived with their parents, eight alone, four with children but without a partner, one with other family members, and two with friends. Eight participants were immigrant workers with extended family living abroad. Five of the sample (3 women, 2 men) cared for an elderly adult relative who lived with them or nearby.

Table 19. Proportion of interview participants who reported currently living with children

	ALL	MEN	WOMEN
Child < 5 years	1	0	1
Child 5 – 17 years	11	5	6
Child over 18	2	1	1
No children living with them	26	13	13

6.3. Working hours

The majority of participants (15 women, 18 men) worked full-time, and of the seven part-time employees, only one was male. The nature of part-time work varied; whilst most worked at pre-arranged times (i.e. on the same day between the same hours each week), three participants worked on a ‘floating’ part-time basis, whereby they were able to change the days and sometimes the hours they worked according to both their and their managers’ needs on a week-by-week basis. Of the 7 participants who worked atypical hours¹⁸ (1

¹⁸ Atypical hours is defined as before 8am, after 7pm, or at weekends – not including overtime. Some participants worked both atypical hours and overtime.

woman, 6 men), four worked on shifts which included night and weekend work, and three worked the occasional weekend.

6.4. ResearchOrg policies

6.4.1. Annual leave

Participants generally spoke about their annual leave allowance in a positive light, comparing ResearchOrg favourably to previous employment, or describing the amount of annual leave as a positive aspect of their job. Whilst for most participants taking annual leave was unproblematic, in some cases it required some informal negotiation with colleagues. This was particularly the case for the manual employees who worked on a shift system, where colleagues had to work overtime to cover work when others were on annual leave. Michael described this process:

“There’s a written rule that you don’t take leave without having four weeks notice, which is fair enough. The unwritten rule is that if I want a certain day off I’d have to go to the people who are working on that day and say ‘I need to take Tuesday next month off, can you do it?’ Nine times out of ten they all would say ‘not a problem.’ But if they can’t you go to the next fella and so on, and if they can’t do it you can’t do it.”

(Michael, 42, lived with wife and primary school aged child, family abroad, manual, full-time)

6.4.2. Sick leave

Time off work due to ill health featured prominently in participants’ narratives. A number of participants described the procedures and policies for taking sick leave, including ‘phoning in sick’, filling out forms, and the need for a doctor’s certificate. Several participants spoke about factors relating to the local organisational culture that impacted on taking sick leave.

For some participants, the nature of their work meant that if they were away due to ill health no one else would do the work for which they were responsible. For example Adam said:

“[My work] would sit there until I got back, unless it was something that had a certain date on it and then they’d probably find a way round it. In all honesty

there's very little around here that has to be done on a certain day [...] I've got a pile of jobs and I'm sure they pretty much sit there until I can come back.”

(Adam, 37, lived with partner and 2 teenage children, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

Other participants spoke about doing their colleagues' work when they were away from work. In many cases this was described as a negative experience:

“It's hectic, it's not enjoyable, and you never get to stop. You're shattered at the end of the day.”

(Neil, 40, lived with mother and brother, cared for mother, manual, full-time)

In other instances participants described feeling guilty for taking time off work because of ill health due to the impact on colleagues. As for taking annual leave, this was especially pertinent for the manual workers who worked on a shift system:

“If I take off sick it means somebody else has to be away from his family and spend the night shift here and they might have had something planned. All the guys are family guys, every one of them except me, so I don't really want to do that to them if I can help it.

(Fred, 26, lived alone, family abroad, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

6.5. Diversity and interest in work

Many participants were keen to emphasise the diversity and interest of their work, contrary to perceptions of routine and manual work being mundane and monotonous. For some participants having something to do and keeping “your brain active” (Marion) was an important aspect of work, and was related to positive mental health. For example, Hilda stated:

“The work is interesting enough to keep my brain a bit occupied. It goes quickly; we're busy all day so there's no twiddling your thumbs or anything like that.”

(Hilda, 57, lived with husband and teenage child, technical, full-time)

Marion contrasted working at ResearchOrg to a recent time when she was away from work due to an ongoing health problem:

“I guess cos you’re thinking all the time about all the different stuff that we do it keeps your brain active. When I was off I wasn’t really doing a lot, I wasn’t thinking.”

(Marion, 33, lived with partner, cared for grandmother, admin, full-time)

To some extent how participants spoke about this diversity varied between job types. The majority of administrative workers described their jobs as varied, for example:

“There’s quite a lot involved. There are students to look after, and training courses to organise, all sorts of things. People make demands all the time on personnel, it changes all the time.”

(Natasha, 44, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, admin, full-time)

However, some perceived their work as routine:

“A lot of the week it doesn’t change that much, it’s usually fairly routine type things.”

(Grace, 49, lived alone, admin, full-time)

Most participants in manual jobs spoke about their work being fairly varied due to the multitude of tasks they had to complete. One summed up the nature of this variability being within the set boundaries of the job:

“It’s similar tasks but it always varies, you never know what’s gonna turn up”

(Ken, 48, lived with elderly mother, cared for mother, manual, full-time)

However, a small number of participants described their work as being more repetitive:

“I have to switch off a bit really. It’s pretty much the same every day. Maybe one or two days it’s slightly different, but usually it’s the usual run or the usual supplying the scientists, transferring the goods across from the other building to here, taking them up, restocking the store, things like that.”

(Neil, 40, lived with mother and brother, cared for mother, manual, full-time)

Technical employees reported experiencing less variability in their day-to-day work than the administrative and manual workers. However, a number of technical workers emphasised that the routine nature of their work did not mean they found their jobs boring. For example, one participant stated, in response to a question about whether his job varied from day-to-day:

“The job itself is what it is, but I can honestly tell you with my hand on my heart that I’ve never been bored because you can approach the job totally differently. You do the same things, but it’s never routine, although it’s basically a manual job. There are so many things you can do, it just seems like the days fly by.”

(Andy, 48, lived with mother, cared for mother, technical, full-time)

Another participant also highlighted this:

“Although it’s routine you can’t really say two days are ever the same. Some days you are absolutely rushed off your feet and another day it might be quieter. It just depends on what’s going on and what they’re doing.”

(Elsa, 61, lived with husband, technical, part-time)

6.6. Reasons for being in current job

Many participants spoke about why they were in their job at ResearchOrg. Some participants described having little preference for their specific job, instead reporting wanting to or needing to work, regardless of what that work entailed. In many cases this was linked to the need to earn money to live. For example, Hilda stated:

“It was simply money: this one’s paying more than that one.”

(Hilda, 57, lived with husband and teenage child, technical, full-time)

Whilst Ken said:

“Needs are needs, that’s why I ended up here.”

(Ken, 48, lived with elderly mother, cared for mother, manual, full-time)

In other cases the impetus for applying for work with ResearchOrg was described as simply wanting any work. This was particularly the case for Beth, who had experienced a number of health problems which had made applying for jobs difficult:

“It got to the stage where I just wanted to apply for anything. It almost didn’t matter to me what I was gonna do, as long as I got out of the house and got a job.”

(Beth, 24, lived with parents, admin, part-time)

This sense of lack of preference was also indicated by a number of participants with caring responsibilities, who cited working hours as being important to them when looking for a job. For example, Elsa described how her and her husband’s working hours fitted around

their childcare responsibilities ('tag team parenting'¹⁹ (Dienhart, 2001)) when her children were younger:

“When I started at half-past eight it fitted in with the children. I saw them to school and then went to work, until they got old enough and they didn't want me collecting them. And my husband had shift work so that worked out quite well because there was no childcare like there is now. That's why I took this job.”

(Elsa, 61, lived with husband, technical, part-time)

Women in the UK fulfil the majority of caring responsibilities both for children (Matheson & Summerfield, 2001) and for sick, elderly or disabled adults²⁰ (Office of National Statistics, accessed 2008), so it was perhaps not surprising that women made up the majority of participants who spoke about applying for their current job because the hours allowed them to fulfil caring responsibilities. However, a small number of men also spoke about this. Bill, a widower with lone responsibility for caring for his teenage son, spoke about leaving his previous job where he had worked shifts, to work for ResearchOrg, where he had fixed working hours in a manual job. Michael also spoke about preferring the fixed hours he worked at ResearchOrg as they allowed him to be at home to share the caring responsibilities for his son with his wife, before and after he went to school. He described how in his home country his extended family would have assisted with caring for young children. However, as he had no family nearby in the UK, he had to play a more active role in caring for his son.

In other instances, the relatively low levels of demand and responsibility the job placed upon employees was given as a reason for applying for the job with ResearchOrg. As with hours of work, some of these narratives were linked to caring responsibilities. For example, Tasmin spoke about how, before she had children, she worked as an office manager. However, following having children she became “fairly used to doing all the practical things around the house” so applied for work which allowed her to use these manual skills.

¹⁹ 'Tag team parenting' is defined as a pattern whereby mothers and fathers coordinate their paid employment, allowing them to also take 'shifts' at being the “on-duty parent in charge of caring for the child during various times on any given day and over the course of a week, a month, or a year” (Dienhart, 2001: p.975).

²⁰ However, the questionnaire data found similar levels of reported regular care for sick, elderly or disabled adults amongst women and men.

She described wanting a job which kept her busy and allowed her to “get stuck in” yet also allowed her to “forget about it” at the end of the day so she could deal with the household and family demands:

“After you have children you get fairly used to doing all the practical things round the house. Mentally you’re so busy with dealing with children and their homework, the different classes they have to go to, supporting a husband with his work; it’s easier to do practical work. I find it satisfying that I can just get on and get stuck in – just get through it and go, forget about it.”

(Tasmin, 43, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, cared for elderly mother who lived nearby, technical, full-time)

However, the men who spoke about the low demands and responsibilities of their job tended to frame it more within the context of their previous professional occupations. For example, Peter spoke about what he was looking for in a job following being made redundant from his previous work:

“I wanted something that kept me busy and occupied with some sort of social interaction. Not the sort of thing where when the phone rings you know you’ve got a problem. That was the sort of job I was doing before, whereas now it’s somebody else’s responsibility.”

(Peter, 59, lived with wife and adult child, manual, full-time)

6.6.1. The importance of income

For many participants, income was a key component of being in paid employment. Whilst some people referred directly to the amount they earned, for example describing whether they considered their work well or less-well paid, or comparing their income at the time of interview to previous incomes, others spoke about being able to provide for themselves and/or their family.

Some participants described their work at ResearchOrg being relatively well paid in relation to comparable jobs. For example, Colin described it as a “good paying job” and Ingrid spoke about how the combination of the rate of pay and being familiar with her job prevented her from leaving, despite having a number of problems with colleagues and the organisation. However, not all participants spoke about their income so favourably, with some participants describing earning less at ResearchOrg than in previous employment. In

these cases, participants often spoke about their income in relation to their wider life. For example, Jack reported the difficulties he had in providing for his wife and two young children on his relatively low income, and the responsibility he felt towards them as a provider:

“Sometimes it’s very hard because I’m the Minister of Finance in my house. Everything depends on me, and my income is low. I’ve got to manage to survive with the little money I manage to get [...] I don’t think I can make my children and my wife happy if I don’t earn. It’s not love, but money. You must be there so you can see and feed them, but if they had nothing I don’t think they would be happy.”

(Jack, 38, lived with wife and 2 primary school aged children, family abroad, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

Laura also spoke about the importance of her income to the household, describing herself, unusually for women in this sample, as the ‘breadwinner’ following her husband’s redundancy several years ago:

“I have been the breadwinner for quite a few years so it’s been really important that I’ve been working.”

(Laura, 70, lived with husband, cared for elderly aunt, admin, part-time, also worked part-time)

In other cases participants described how lack of income prohibited their leisure activities. This was particularly the case for women with caring responsibilities. For example, at one point in the interview Cathy spoke about her husband regularly playing golf which he was able to do due to working shifts, yet both finances and feeling “shattered” inhibited her from taking her children to the cinema:

“My poor son’s been nagging to see the Bond film since it came out and it’s now out of the cinema and he’s annoyed. By the time you’ve bought that and the meal afterwards you can say goodbye to over 50, 60 quid.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

6.7. Previous and future employment

This section presents an overview of how participants spoke about their previous employment and future work plans. This highlights the lack of homogeneity of working backgrounds and future aspirations amongst the sample.

6.7.1. Previous employment

The career paths of participants varied; while some had worked in a similar job all their lives, the majority who spoke about their career trajectories had worked in a number of different jobs including nursing, systems analysis, national defence work (army, navy etc), butchery, information technology (IT), architecture, and the post service. Some examples of the more diverse career trajectories were:

- 1) nurse → childcare → personal assistant → administrative worker at a warehouse → administrative worker with ResearchOrg

(Female; 44)

- 2) applied chemist → construction worker → care assistant → agency worker (animal technician for various organisations on a temporary basis) → animal technician with ResearchOrg

(Male; 47)

The reasons given for these changes, and the attitudes regarding the transitions between different job types varied. Some, including Ian, who was made redundant from his previous job, were keen to highlight how their current employment was very different to their previous career:

“In terms of my normal past environment it’s diametrically opposite because I’m not responsible for anyone’s work which I was previously. My other job was a very responsible job [...] everything was very organised and professional [...] Here, and I don’t mean this in a derogatory way, I’m in charge of nothing. The people I work with, are, shall we say, from the lower end of the educational spectrum.”

(Ian, 63, lived with wife, manual, full-time, also worked part-time)

The issue regarding levels of choice exercised in these career transitions is complex. Both Ian and Peter were made redundant from their previous, more highly qualified, jobs. However, at later points in the interviews they both presented the move to ResearchOrg as a positive shift in relation to their previous employment, in terms of less responsibility and stress. Ingrid’s situation was another example of the complex nature of choice in career changes, having left her job as an office manager to become a technical worker at ResearchOrg due to childcare demands:

“I changed from a very good job. The money was a big drop. It was very hard, a different environment, different people. In the previous job I was working a lot on my own, and here I had to work with people that I didn’t really have a lot in common with. I came to this job when I was quite old, and in [technical work] you get a lot of young people who leave school and come straight into this profession.”

(Ingrid, 52, lived with husband, family abroad, technical, full-time)

Some people spoke about their current job as being a positive experience in comparison to their previous employment in terms of the work ethic and benefits such as holiday entitlement. For example, Adam contrasted his previous job with his work at ResearchOrg:

“You were supposed to finish at six o’clock at night but you’d never have all your work done and you couldn’t go until it was done. [...] I’ve done horrible jobs enough and now I’ve done this I’d rather stay here.”

(Adam, 37, lived with partner and 2 teenage children, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

6.7.2. Future work plans

Of the participants who spoke about their future work plans, more women than men spoke about wanting to move into different occupations, while the majority of men described wanting to stay in their existing job. This was probably related to age, with the men in the sample being generally older than the women, and therefore closer to retirement. This was illustrated by Thomas’ narrative:

“I feel that if I’m happy with the work I would stay till retirement. I have already reached the age that I wouldn’t want to jump from here to there. I would say the environment is quite good, and the pay is relatively high compared to many other places.”

(Thomas, 47, lived with brother and cousin, family abroad, technical, full-time)

Very few participants spoke about working for ResearchOrg in a different role. This could be due to the perceived lack of potential career development opportunities within ResearchOrg for administrative, manual and technical employees. As Cathy stated:

“ResearchOrg are not world famous for promoting within.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

6.8. Identity in paid employment

6.8.1. On being a ‘good’ worker

Throughout the interviews, many participants spoke about being ‘good’ workers. Common themes included: wanting to do their job well; enjoying a challenge; and continuing to work when unwell. Because they had been contacted through their workplace, they may have felt they needed to present themselves as ‘good’ employees as they saw the interviewer as being linked to ResearchOrg, despite reassurances of anonymity and impartiality.

Participants presented themselves as ‘good’ workers in different ways. For example, Cathy stated:

“I like a challenge. I’m not afraid of a bit of hard work and I really like to just go for it and be kept busy.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

Whilst Beth said:

“I don’t like to walk away and think I’ve left work unfinished [...] I hate saying no, I don’t like turning down work. I like to be able to take on everything, to produce brilliant results and great work.”

(Beth, 24, lived with parents, admin, part-time)

However, presentation of self as a ‘good’, reliable worker was often closely entwined with the dominant notion that ‘family comes first’. When talking about their dedication to work, participants often appeared keen to emphasise their family above all else, yet maintaining paid employment through being considered a ‘good’ worker was essential in order to provide for their family, thereby making the two identities mutually dependent. For example, Stuart stated:

“I’ve got a lot of pride in my work. I like doing it well, but work’s not as important as your family.”

(Stuart, 48, lived alone, manual, full-time)

Participants presented themselves as ‘good’ employees, as well as healthy individuals, through narratives about never or rarely being unwell, or continuing to work through

sickness ('presenteeism'²¹ (Aronsson et al., 2000)). For example, Jack stated: "I don't fall sick" and Andy said: "everyone feels ill now and then, but not enough not to come to work." This appeared to be a feature more of men's narratives than of women's. To an extent this can be explained by job type. Four of the men who spoke about rarely being unwell worked on a shift system where colleagues had to cover their shifts if they were unable to work. This sense of imposing on colleagues' personal time, and the sense of obligation to colleagues, appeared to be a factor. For example, Michael stated:

"At the end of the day if you were in a normal job you'd just ring in sick, you just wouldn't come in. But if you ring in sick here whoever's on call that day will be sitting with their families. You just don't like being the reason for them to come in, cos we're all obliged to cover some sick leave."

(Michael, 42, lived with wife and primary school aged child, family abroad, manual, full-time)

In some of the male participants' narratives there was a sense that by continuing to work when unwell they were showing a level of strength and resilience. For example, Fred linked "never going sick" with his sense of pride:

"I never go sick, it's against my beliefs. I haven't been sick in years, it's a pride thing. Even if I'm dying I'll come to work."

(Fred, 26, lived alone, family abroad, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

He later described a specific incident of food poisoning when he had continued to work despite being unwell:

"A couple months ago I worked a day shift and then had food poisoning. I was sick the whole night, then just put on my uniform and came straight to work not having slept at all, back into another 12-hour shift, and it killed me. But I just don't like taking sick if I can help it."

As in O'Brien's (2006) study, in some cases participants referred to their childhood for developing their notion of what was acceptable:

²¹ The definition of presenteeism adopted in this study is "the phenomenon of people, despite complaints and ill health that should prompt rest and absence from work, still turning up at their jobs" (Aronsson, Gustafsson, & Dallner, 2000: p.503), as opposed to that of 'decreased presenteeism', where employees are present yet under-productive at work (Koopman, Pelletier, Murray, Sharda, Berger, Turpin et al., 2002).

“I suppose it’s the way I’ve been brought up. When I was a kid if you were sick you were in bed, and if you weren’t sick you were well enough to go to school; if you’re able to, you go and work. But I wouldn’t come in if I’m so unwell I can’t do anything. Maybe it’s bad for me, I don’t know. It’s just the way I am.”

(Peter, 59, lived with wife and adult child, manual, full-time)

For a number of participants, the sense of keeping their life ‘normal’ was prominent in narratives regarding continuing to work when unwell. This was particularly evident in two of the female participants’ narratives, where they described serious health conditions for which they had only taken a short period of time off work (Hilda) or during which they continued to work (Laura):

“I’ve only been off once. I had cancer of the breast. That was just ten days off. I was alright, but that’s me, you know?”

(Hilda, 57, lived with husband and teenage child, technical, full-time)

“I can’t sit at home and think ‘I’ve got a back problem.’ I come in and think ‘I don’t know if I’m gonna be able to walk up that corridor.’ People used to say ‘you’re walking really badly’ and I was, it was awful, but I just did it. That’s just the way I am.”

(Laura, 70, lived with husband, cared for elderly aunt, admin, part-time, also worked part-time)

6.8.2. Position in relation to research and other ‘non-professional’ staff

Some participants spoke about their relationship with research staff. Participants often set themselves apart from the research staff, referring to the hierarchy within the organisation. For example, Elsa described, on occasions, asking researchers for assistance:

“I’d say to [the researchers] sometimes ‘will you do us a favour?’ and they do. They’re really good here. There are not many that are: ‘you’re only... don’t ask me to do that.’ There are some, trust me, but not many.”

(Elsa, 61, lived with husband, technical, part-time)

By stating “they’re really good here”, Elsa indicated that she did not necessarily expect researchers to assist her with support work tasks. Cathy also spoke about her relationship with researchers in the context of hierarchy and roles within the organisation:

“Some of the scientists are absolutely brilliant. They’re really nice, genuine people and they know what it’s like. But others, I don’t know if it’s cos they’re academic, they live in their own little world and they’re so focused on what they’re doing, some of them barely give you the time of day and they only ever speak to you if they need something.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

There appeared to be a perception of research staff as being extremely dedicated to their work, to the extent that it almost removed them from the ‘real’ world. In some cases, participants directly related this job dedication to their own situation. For example, Elaine described not having the “same passion” for her job as some researchers. Elaine is unusual within the sample in that she was on a work placement with her university course, and therefore her work aspirations may have been more similar to junior research staff as opposed to administrative, manual and technical employees. However, her narrative regarding the perception of research staff as being “passionate” and extremely dedicated to their work, in some cases to the detriment of other areas of their lives, is representative of sentiments expressed by many participants.

“The people here are so passionate about their work. Not only do they know everything within their specialised field they could possibly know, but they are also really dedicated to what they do, whereas I don’t have that. I am really enjoying what I’m doing but I don’t have the same passion they do because I’ve only just started.”

(Elaine, 21, lived with parents, technical, full-time)

There were a number of examples of participants presenting themselves in relation to their work as ‘non-professional’ workers within ResearchOrg. Some participants emphasised their difference from their peers. For example, referring to his previous employment in a professional occupation, Peter stated:

“I’m probably slightly different to other people you’ve been interviewing.”

(Peter, 59, lived with wife and adult child, manual, full-time)

Throughout the interview Peter appeared keen to set himself apart from his colleagues in relation to his experiences, qualifications and intellect. He described positively the

relatively low levels of demand and responsibility at his job in ResearchOrg compared to his previous job.

The status of being an administrative, manual or technical worker within the organisation was raised by a small number of participants. Some spoke positively about this. For example, Marion, relating her position within the workplace to a period of time when she was unable to work due to ill-health, stated:

“We’re quite an important part of the unit. You feel as though you’re doing something important, whereas I wasn’t really doing anything at home.”

(Marion, 33, lived with partner, cared for grandmother, admin, full-time)

However, a minority of participants did not speak so positively about their status within ResearchOrg. For example, Cathy said:

“I’m a [technical worker]. I’m the lowest of the low apart from the cleaners.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

The sense of being at the bottom of the hierarchy was also raised by Ken; in the context of future restructuring of the organisation, he described himself as “bottom of the pile.”

6.9. Chapter summary

The interview participants were diverse in relation to age, family situation, and previous work experience. Whilst there were some shared experiences of job type and role, a number of factors varied. For example, there were a variety of reported experiences and attitudes towards work related policies such as sick leave and training, indicating that experiences and availability may vary across job types and between ResearchOrg divisions.

The type of job and hours worked were inextricably linked to gender, with the majority of manual workers being male and the majority of administrative and technical workers being female. Similarly, whilst the majority of the sample worked full-time hours, those who worked part-time were mainly women. Therefore analysis of the sample by gender or job type will always be complex due to the interrelatedness of these factors. An unexpected finding was the diversity of work backgrounds, employment trajectories and motivation for working at ResearchOrg.

7. Chapter 7: Paid employment and its relationship with other domains

This chapter examines the reported experiences of paid employment amongst the ResearchOrg sample, whilst recognising the interconnectivity of this area of life with other domains. It begins by outlining the conceptual framework within which the chapter is framed, focusing on Karasek's (1981) job strain model. It then examines how participants spoke about their employment, in particular job demands, control over working practices, and social support at work. Where relevant, the gendered nature of participants' reported experiences are examined, along with how health was referred to within narratives.

7.1.1. Conceptual framework: job strain model

The findings presented within this chapter are framed by quantitative literature focusing on work and health, in particular from within the job and organisational stress field (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001). Karasek's (1981) influential job strain model has formed the theoretical basis for the majority of large-scale studies of job stress (Fox, Dwyer, & Ganster, 1993). This theory proposes that psychological strain and subsequent illness result from an interaction between the demands of paid employment ('job demands') and the levels of control workers have over these demands. Job demands are defined as psychological as opposed to physical stressors, and include factors such as a hectic work pace, high work load, and a lack of time. Job control is defined by two components: a worker's power to make decisions about their work, and the variety of skills they use.

Whilst Karasek's study specifically examined the association between job strain and cardiovascular disease amongst Swedish male workers, the model has wider applications. As the diagram below illustrates (figure 2), combinations of low and high stress with low and high levels of ability to make decisions (control) result in different levels of job strain. A worker who has high levels of control but low levels of job demand would be predicted to experience low strain (bottom left corner of diagram). Conversely, a worker experiencing high levels of job demand coupled with low control would experience high strain (top right corner of diagram).

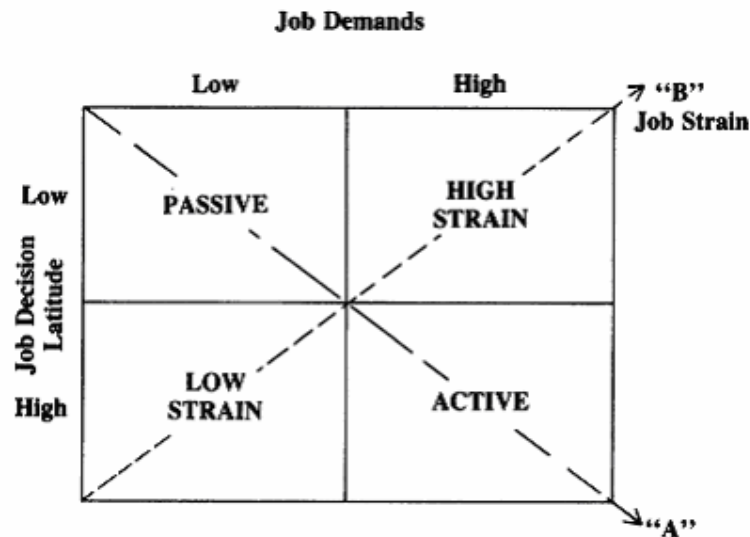


Figure 2. Karasek et al's Job Strain model (Karasek et al., 1981: p.695)

Karasek's model has been critiqued on a number of grounds. Firstly, the model has mainly been tested on male workers, failing to investigate women's health in 'high strain' female dominated occupations, such as administration and nursing. Studies that have examined women's experiences of work strain have found that there is a similar interaction between job demands and levels of control for women, although there is debate surrounding the strength of these associations (for more details see review by Emslie, 1997: pp.84-5).

Secondly, the operational definition of 'control' is broad, thereby threatening to make Karasek's control construct "virtually indistinguishable from the more traditional conceptualization of stress" (Fox et al., 1993: p.291). Control can be viewed as a relative, situational factor, as it reflects on employees' perceptions of their individual work environment, therefore making it difficult to quantify; what one person considers to be 'control', another may not (Cooper et al., 2001; Fox et al., 1993). However, within the context of a qualitative study, meanings of control can be explored in a way they cannot in quantitative research.

As Karasek and colleagues (1981) acknowledge, social support was not included as a moderator in their study. Definitions of social support are disputed by researchers (Oakley, 1992), and include social contact through family, friends and work colleagues, and material resources such as housing and income. There is some evidence that social support acts to alleviate the impact of occupational stress on mental and physical health among

men (LaRocco, House, & French, 1980). This issue was addressed by Johnson and Hall (1988) who proposed the ‘demand-control-support’ model in order to incorporate the moderating or ‘buffering’ effect of social support on employees. This model can be used to examine the impact of different levels of job strain on workers with both high and low levels of social support. There is no consistent empirical evidence for this model (Cooper et al., 2001). For example, whilst a study of employed men in the United States (Landsbergis, Schnall, Dietz, Friedman, & Pickering, 1992) found evidence of a three-way interaction involving demand, control and social support, a reverse buffering effect was also found, where social support appeared to exacerbate rather than alleviate the effects of work stressors. Another study of employees and supervisors in a United States insurance firm (Schaubroeck & Fink, 1998) found significant demand-control-support interactions were more consistent for supervisory as opposed to colleague support. However, the findings were not strong enough to provide evidence for social support acting as a buffer.

Karasek’s study was initially carried out in a Swedish setting, which raises questions regarding whether it is relevant to a UK setting. However, several UK based studies have found support for the model (for example, see Stansfeld, Head, & Ferrie, 1999). Furthermore, whilst the model continues to be influential (Fox et al., 1993), the data were published in 1981, raising questions regarding its relevance today. However, several recent studies have found continuing support for the model (for example, see Elovainio, Kivimaki, Ek, Vahtera, Honkonen, Taanila et al., 2007; Noblet & Rodwell, 2009). Finally, Karasek’s model was developed using quantitative data. Therefore by applying the concepts to qualitative data, this study aims to expand the application and understanding of the job strain model.

7.2. Job demands

As outlined in the previous chapter, some participants spoke about applying for their current job with ResearchOrg because it was perceived to be less demanding, with lower levels of responsibility than some other occupations. This was particularly important for two groups of participants; workers who had been made redundant from a professional, high-demand job (all men) and workers with caring responsibilities who wanted a low-demand job in order to fulfil these responsibilities (majority women).

Within the sample as a whole, few people reported finding their job highly demanding. Indeed, some participants reported their work to be distinctly undemanding. For example, Adam contrasted his work at ResearchOrg with previous employment where he had been expected to work unpaid overtime and had been given minimal holiday allowance:

“This is like a holiday camp compared to jobs that I’ve had.”

(Adam, 37, lived with partner and 2 teenage children, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

Fiona also contrasted her ResearchOrg position with previous jobs, and her home-life where she reported “running around, looking after two children”, stating:

“I’ve worked in stressful places before and this just isn’t. There’s not enough work to get stressed about.”

(Fiona, 35, lived with 2 teenager children, admin, full-time)

In contrast to the participants who constructed the low-demand, low responsibility nature of the work as being beneficial to them, a minority of participants presented this in a negative light. For example, Fred spoke about his work being “extremely boring and mundane,” later comparing himself to a prisoner, with a certain sense of powerlessness over his situation (he remained in the job as he was saving money to return to his home country), saying “here I am, doing my time.” In these instances, the lack of intellectual or time demands may have become stressors for the individuals concerned. In his home country Fred described working in a highly demanding job, yet he described this in positive terms. Thus the concept of demand, as well as its impacts, may be subjective to the individual.

Job demands existed for participants in three key ways: time demands, physical demands and mental demands. Whilst Karasek and colleagues’ (1981) did not include physical stressors within their definition of demand, participants in this study, particularly manual workers, often presented this as a form of strain. In some cases participants reported low levels of demand in one area (e.g. low levels of time demand), and reported high demand in another area (e.g. the physically demanding nature of work). In other cases, participants described demanding situations as unusual.

Job demands were constructed both positively and negatively. For example, whilst periods of high demand were considered negative for some, other participants described preferring

times of high demand, or used them as a form of escape from higher strain areas of life. In some cases high levels of physical job demands were reported to have a negative impact, whilst in other instances lack of physical job demand was seen as negative.

7.2.1. Time-related job demands

In many cases, participants discussed the time their jobs ‘took away’ from other domains through long working hours, or a hectic work pace. The most common example participants gave of having busier schedules was when colleagues were on holiday or unwell, so the participants had to fulfil their duties as well as their own. Janet described time-related demands when she first started working for ResearchOrg:

“When I started here my colleague had a dreadful illness. It wasn’t her fault but she was off for quite a long time. It was very difficult because, although the other part-timer was here, if she wanted a holiday you were on your own. [...] When somebody’s off sick you’ve got to cover. It doesn’t work because you’re not doing your job properly.”

(Janet, 62, lived alone, technical, full-time, also worked part-time)

Denise also spoke about time-related job demands. Due to her manager leaving, Denise was obliged to temporarily take on a supervisory role which placed a high degree of demand on her. She described how this level of demand contrasted with what she had hoped for when she had applied for the job:

“I’d like to be able to come to work, do my job, go home with no stress, no hassle. Today has been one of them mornings where I have had all stress levels going.”

(Denise, 29, lived with husband and pre-school child, technical, full-time)

Some participants described employing strategies to manage occasions when their work was more demanding. This usually involved working unpaid hours, either during their scheduled breaks, or before or after work. These instances sometimes caused work-life balance issues for the participants affected. For example, Marion described how her department had been involved in transferring to a new administrative system and she had experienced unusually high job demands. However, due to her father’s illness she was not able to work extra unpaid hours:

“It was so busy. I was coming in early to try and get a lot of the work done but I felt that I couldn’t stay late, which I maybe would have done, but because my Dad was in hospital at the time there was no way I was staying late to do work rather than go and see him [...] you felt you had so much work that you just weren’t getting anywhere.”

(Marion, 33, lived with partner, cared for grandmother, admin, full-time)

However, in the majority of situations, working extra hours because of high job demand was presented as an active choice by participants, related to overall positive feelings about their work. For example, Adam said:

“If I hated every second of being here I’d go on the dot and never go over. But what tends to happen is if I’m halfway through doing something and I’ve got ten minutes left I think ‘I’m going to keep going’ [...] it’s nothing really, it doesn’t bother me.”

(Adam, 37, lived with partner and 2 teenage children, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

Alice described not feeling pressured to work extra unpaid hours, describing it as her “choice” to complete tasks:

“I don’t feel like I’m pressured into having to work extra hours. I very rarely feel that I should be staying longer, it’s just my choice to carry on.”

(Alice, 45, lived with 2 primary school aged children, admin, part-time)

One participant’s experience was unusual as she spoke about her job frequently being particularly demanding:

“A couple of weeks ago I had two jobs which were quite urgent. One person was chasing me saying ‘when is this gonna be done?’ and more and more people were coming to me with work. The drawer was absolutely bursting with filing and I was thinking ‘how am I gonna cope with this?’ For about a week I was really stressed out about it. I got quite run-down, and then it got to the stage where I wasn’t very well at the weekend, and I just thought ‘this has to stop, I have to do something about it’.”

(Beth, 24, lived with parents, admin, part-time)

This was unusual. Beth had begun working for ResearchOrg full-time, but had reduced to part-time hours due to health issues. However, she reported her workload remaining the same, despite the change in working hours, which led to an increased level of job demand.

Participants described a range of effects of excess time-related job demands. Alongside “not doing your job properly” as described by Janet above, other participants described the impact of busy periods of time when colleagues were away. For example, Rachel talked about the impact on her when her co-worker was away from work, both in terms of time (“working through my break”) and physical health (being “absolutely shattered”).

However, in a minority of cases high levels of job demand were constructed positively. Some participants described preferring their work when they were busy:

“I like to be busy, to get on; it makes the day go quicker. Sometimes I’m scratching round for things to do and pretending to look busy and I hate it.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

Tasmin described the positive nature of keeping busy in the context of wider family problems she was experiencing. For Tasmin, keeping physically busy at work allowed her to “switch off” and gave her some respite from her concerns outside of work:

“The busier I am the better it feels [...] I think when you’re busy [bad memories] don’t come back [...] you feel a satisfaction in doing things, whereas if you’re working in an office or in a job where you had to read then your mind can still wander, you can’t channel it away from the things you don’t want it to do, whereas with manual work you can switch off.”

(Tasmin, 43, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, cared for elderly mother who lives nearby, technical, full-time)

7.2.2. Physical job demands

Physical job demands were reported by participants in both positive and negative ways. As might be expected, job type had an impact, with administrative jobs generally reported to be less active and manual jobs more active. Technical jobs were also, in some cases, described as fairly physically demanding. For example, Thomas described the physical aspects of working in an animal house:

“Checking the animals is actually physically very demanding. You have approximately 60 cages. The normal routine is pulling each cage out and checking to see that the animal is OK.”

(Thomas, 47, lived with brother and cousin, family abroad, technical, full-time)

Positive impacts of physical job demands were described mainly in relation to health benefits. Physical activity (“we must walk miles [...] you’re on the go all the time” – Elsa, technical work; “this keeps me fairly active” – Laura, admin work), and lifting animal cages (“I must have good muscles [...] I don’t need to go to the gym that often” – Debbie, technical work) were presented as positive aspects of participants’ work. In many cases, keeping physically active at work was presented in the context of participants’ wider lives. This was particularly the case for the older men in the sample. For example, Bill spoke about recently being diagnosed with diabetes and a minor heart problem. However, he felt that the active nature of his work meant he maintained some level of physical health:

“The exercise I get [at work] helps me. It keeps my heart going. With the exercise that I do, hopefully I’ll get an early warning that there’s something seriously wrong. That’s why I’m thinking if I can keep to the job then the good points far outweigh the bad points.”

(Bill, 60, lived with teenage child, manual, full-time)

Neil also spoke about the positive nature of keeping physically active in relation to his age:

“I’m on the move more or less all of the time. Especially as I’m getting later on in life I think that helps.”

(Neil, 40, lived with mother and brother, cared for mother, manual, full-time)

A number of negative issues were highlighted. These mainly took the form of muscle and joint pain, or injury which affected participants to varying degrees, in some cases limiting activity. Manual workers were more likely to report physical strain due to carrying heavy loads as part of their work. For example, Adam spoke about the physical effects of his work, and related it to the impact on his personal time at weekends:

“I’m always straining my forearms and whatever, carpal tunnel syndrome I think they said it was. It’s from holding heavy screwdrivers and stuff like that. You end up resting at the weekend because of what you’ve done during the week.”

(Adam, 37, lived with partner and 2 teenage children, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

Some administrative workers also spoke about the physical nature of their work, or lack thereof. This was mainly related to inactivity (“I’m sitting down quite a bit of the time” – Fiona, admin work), although there were some, perhaps, more unexpected negative physical aspects of administrative work. For example, Beth described the physical nature of filing:

“I think when people think of filing they just think it’s a few bits of paper, shuffling it around, but because the filing cabinets are quite packed, it’s quite physical [...] when you’re pulling files out it hurts the muscles in your arms quite a lot. If you’re sitting on the floor your back isn’t properly supported, your neck isn’t supported so you end up with backache when you go home. If you’re doing this every day, all day, it’s really exhausting.”

(Beth, 24, lived with parents, admin, part-time)

7.2.3. Mental job demands

Overall, participants described low levels of mental job demands, for example in the form of stress or worry about work issues. For some, this was presented as an important consideration when applying for the job:

“I wanted something that would be less stressful [than my previous job] so that I could do my job, go home and forget about it.”

(Natasha, 44, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, admin, full-time)

Participants also spoke about the positive aspect of the low levels of stress or responsibility in their work, in particular not thinking about work at home.

“It’s the sort of job where there isn’t any stress or responsibility. I mean, some responsibility, but nothing like the major ones. It’s the sort of thing that at the end of the day you can go home and think ‘that’s it’, I’m not casting my mind back and thinking of things that I haven’t done and writing lists for the next day.”

(Peter, 59, lived with wife and adult child, manual, full-time)

However, some participants did describe mental job demands. In some cases this was presented as positive, for example as a way of keeping busy. However, mental job demands also impacted on participants in a negative way. These tended to take the form of isolated incidents, for example a disagreement with a colleague or an accident at work. For example, Debbie spoke about worrying about a “huge mistake” she made, and how this affected her both at and outside of work:

“Recently I made a huge mistake. I was so worried about it. It was my fault. My line manager was very supportive, she said not to worry, but over the weekend I was kind of worried.”

(Debbie, 22, lived with friends, family abroad, technical, part-time, also studied full-time)

There were a number of examples of mental job demands creating work-life imbalance. For example, Cathy described how mentally demanding days impacted on her life outside of work, and how combining paid employment with childcare responsibilities led to her feeling “shattered”:

“When you come home from work and you’ve either had a mentally stressful day or physically been running around, you just wanna sit down and chill and not even have to think about anything. But you can’t because you have to get the kids’ dinner, make sure they’ve done their homework, get their lunchboxes ready. I don’t really settle down until gone nine o’clock, but by then I’m too shattered to care.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

7.3. Control at work

As was highlighted above, control over working practices is a key component of Karasek’s (1981) job strain model, but it has been critiqued due to the broad definition of the term (Cooper et al., 2001; Fox et al., 1993). Within this section control is defined as the power participants had to make decisions about their work, and the variety of skills they were able to use. There were three main ways in which participants spoke about control at work: in relation to working practices, in relation to working hours, and in relation to skills used. Gender appeared to play a role in the type of control participants spoke about, with men

being more likely to talk about control over working practices, whilst women were more likely to raise control over working hours as an issue.

7.3.1. Control over working practices

Control over working practices was only raised by a small number of participants. This may have been because the majority accepted that they had low levels of control over their work compared to some other occupations. It is possible that this was seen as inseparable from the low levels of responsibility described by some participants (“it’s the sort of job where there isn’t any stress or responsibility” – Peter, manual work); with higher levels of control comes greater responsibility and thus greater potential stress. In some cases, levels of control appeared to be dependent upon perceived levels of trust by supervisors. This was demonstrated through Neil’s and Colin’s narratives. Neil described his relationship with his boss positively, emphasising the level of trust he felt she had in him:

“I’m left alone to do my work. My boss is a good boss; you do the work, you get no complaints and she’s happy. It’s good not having your boss looking over your shoulder. She very much welcomes trust. It’s a nice set up.”

(Neil, 40, lived with mother and brother, cared for mother, manual, full-time)

In contrast to Neil, Colin spoke about a lack of control due to a lack of “freedom” and not having the space to make mistakes:

“I enjoy the work but I don’t enjoy the managers constantly being there. I’m no’ saying they’re on me twenty-four-seven, but I know if I do a thing wrong they’re on me. They don’t give you any freedom.”

(Colin, 50, lived with elderly parents, manual, full-time)

Adam spoke about feeling frustrated at having to carry out what he considered to be unnecessary tasks. Within this extract he situated his frustration within his broader position within ResearchOrg, stating that he did not feel it was his “place” to raise these issues:

“If I’m told ‘do this’ then I’ve got to do it. I can’t tell someone ‘you can’t have this done because...’ I don’t really matter; it’s not my place to.”

(Adam, 37, lived with partner and 2 teenage children, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

7.3.2. Control over working hours

The majority of narratives regarding control over employment centred on working hours. For example, Kirsty spoke about having some level of control over her working practices (“nobody watches over you”) and control over working hours (“pretty easy going”) within the constraints of the responsibilities of her role in relation to her colleagues (“my job actually starts everything going”):

“Nobody watches over you, but because my job actually starts everything going I need to be here before everybody else. Because I make up [the chemicals], Alf can’t pour them unless they’re ready for him. But if I’m late half-an-hour nobody’s gonna say anything, or if you want to go home half-an-hour early you come in half-an-hour earlier, so it’s not really any hassle. Pretty easy-going, as long as you get your work done.”

(Kirsty, 61, lived with husband, technical, full-time)

However, Cathy reported having less control over her hours and not seeing the rationale for this. Some level of variability of policies applied to employees was evident within Cathy’s and Kirsty’s narratives.

“On days where I had to get home, before my daughter started at secondary school, there was certain days which they would let me go earlier if I slogged me guts out and did lots more hours beforehand, or took my holiday. It wasn’t a case of coming in earlier, they wouldn’t allow that. I had to take it out of holiday or something.

“SG: Do you know why you aren’t able to do it differently?”

“No, not really. I don’t think the fish are that bothered when they get fed, why I couldn’t start at, say, half-past seven. I know the scientists are allowed to. Some of them come in at eleven o’clock and they work until a ridiculous hour at night but we’re not allowed to. It’s just how they set the rules out.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

Lack of rationality appeared to be a key factor in Cathy’s discontent with her lack of control over working hours. She contrasted her position with the scientists working in her division, whom she perceived to have a greater level of control and flexibility over their working hours. This sense of perceived control is an important factor. Whilst some

participants in the study did not make use of formal flexible working policies, they perceived there to be a level of control available to them, within the necessary restrictions of their job demands (for example, in relation to what was practically possible in their work, or the needs of their colleagues). However, participants, such as Cathy did not perceive themselves to have access to control over working hours, which led to dissatisfaction.

7.3.3. Control over skills used at work

As was highlighted earlier, participants had a broad range of career paths, with some people having worked in similar occupations all their lives, whilst others had a more varied career trajectory. Some considered themselves overqualified for their job, both in terms of the type of work and in relation to their colleagues, and found this frustrating. In other cases participants expressed relief at working in a job that involved lower levels of demand and responsibility. Some participants spoke about particular skills or interests they had which they were able to use or develop within their work at ResearchOrg.

A small number of participants described feeling overqualified for their work, and therefore had few opportunities to use their skills. For example, Beth described feeling she was “wasting” her degree due to the “basic” nature of the work. She situated this frustration within her wider life, describing how she felt she needed activities outside of work to stimulate her mind:

“I would like something more for myself intellectually, because my job’s quite boring and a bit un-stimulating. I really do need something outside work for my mind to have to think.”

(Beth, 24, lived with parents, admin, part-time)

Selma, a qualified lawyer in her home country, reported feeling frustrated as a result of being overqualified for administrative work. She situated this frustration in the context of her health, describing it as a form of stress:

“In terms of stress, I find it a bit frustrating that I’m over-qualified for what I do [...] I can do more than an administrative job because I’m not originally an administrator. That’s the hardest thing.”

(Selma, 40, lived with friends, family abroad, admin, full-time, also studied part-time)

In other cases, participants contrasted themselves positively with colleagues in relation to being better qualified and more able:

“I’m the most overqualified person in the division for the job [...] of course I was able to organise it quite quickly. A lot of the [manual workers] are a little challenged. They don’t get how to do things. They’re stupid, basically. I mean, they’re really nice guys, I get on great with every one of them, but I did most of their jobs. I soon found that what they did in eight hours, I could do in one, just through a bit of organisation.”

(Michael, 42, lived with wife and primary school aged child, family abroad, manual, full-time)

Some other participants who also considered themselves overqualified for their work at ResearchOrg presented it in a positive light in relation to the lower levels of demand and responsibility they experienced.

7.4. Social support and social contact at work

As outlined in chapter 5, when questionnaire respondents were asked to rate their current job with ResearchOrg, women were more likely than men to value working with ‘friendly people.’ To some extent, these gender differences were reflected in the qualitative findings.

For some, social contact at work was an important form of social support. This was particularly the case for older women who described sharing experiences with colleagues who were at a similar life stage. Hilda spoke about this form of social support in response to a question about whether she felt her work affected her health:

“All the ladies I work with, their children are in their thirties, so they say to me ‘this happened to my son’ or ‘that happened to my daughter’ and that helped keep me quite calm [...] I have very nice working colleagues, I can talk to them. Any worries that I have I can talk through with them.”

(Hilda, 57, lived with husband and teenage child, technical, full-time)

One participant, Jack, spoke about the positive aspects of social contact in a different way. He described the “richness” he felt colleagues had given to his life, emphasising how he

had learned from them, in particular from research staff. At the time of interview Jack was also studying part-time, and spoke about wanting to ‘better’ himself in terms of job status and income so he could better support his young family:

“Since I came here I’ve met different people with different knowledge, different skills. They have contributed a lot to my life. I would say that since I joined here there’s a great difference in my life, not income-wise but in a richer way because the more I talk to people the more I learn.”

(Jack, 38, lived with wife and 2 primary school aged children, family abroad, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

The majority of participants who spoke about social support at work were women, doing so in the context of their broader mental health, contrasting their social contact at work with times in their lives when they had experienced less social contact, and emphasising the social support they felt they gained from common shared experiences with colleagues. However, not all social contact necessarily implied social support. Indeed, some experiences of social contact may have been detrimental to individuals.

7.4.1. Social contact at work as beneficial for mental health

The majority of participants who spoke about social contact at work felt it had a positive impact on their mental health. For example, Alice spoke about the sociability of work in the context of her wider life as a lone parent:

“It’s quite sociable. If I didn’t have that side of work I wouldn’t enjoy it so much. [...] Because I’m on my own with two children most of the time, I don’t get out an awful lot to meet new friends.”

(Alice, 45, lived with 2 primary school aged children, admin, part-time)

However, it was not only women with caring responsibilities who described the benefits of social contact at work for their mental health. Marion, Peter and Beth all compared the social contact they experienced through paid employment with times when they were unemployed or unable to work due to illness. Beth spoke about social contact at work helping to “keep you happy”, and how she felt “depressed” when she was unable to work, situating these benefits in the context of her wider wellbeing:

“I would say the good points of working here, and probably working in general, is that it gets me out of the house, it means I’m socialising with people. When I wasn’t working I did find I got quite depressed. I think social contact’s really important to keep you happy [...] I would definitely say in general it’s a positive thing to have a job.”

(Beth, 24, lived with parents, admin, part-time)

Peter also contrasted his experience of being unemployed with the social contact he had at ResearchOrg. Both Peter and Beth emphasised that, whilst they enjoyed time by themselves, they also valued the social contact work gave them.

“When I was made redundant I wouldn’t see people in the same way as you do in the workplace which was strange. Interacting with somebody is good.”

(Peter, 59, lived with wife and adult child, manual, full-time)

7.4.2. Negative experiences of social contact at work

However, a minority of participants spoke negatively about their social contact at work, usually because of a disagreement with a colleague. For example, Bill stated:

“I don’t get on particularly well with one of the people I work with [...] we just don’t get on and there are things that make me very annoyed. I’ve got to just carry on regardless; hopefully it’ll wash over me”

(Bill, 60, lived with teenage child, manual, full-time)

An interesting aspect of this dynamic is the strength of boundaries between paid employment and other domains. Whilst some participants disclosed personal problems with colleagues, other preferred to keep their social life separate from their work life. For example, Colin said:

“I don’t go out with the work staff. Outside maybe I’ll yak to them but if they go for a quick drink I don’t go. Once I’ve finished my work I like to get away, out the building. It doesnae matter how pally I am with that person, I find if I’m with that person at night-time I’m still at work. The release I get is going out with other mates who are nothing to do with my work.”

(Colin, 50, lived with elderly parents, manual, full-time)

7.5. Chapter summary

Drawing on Karasek's (1981) influential job strain model, this chapter focused on three key areas: job related demands, levels of control, and social support at work.

Job demand is a subjective concept; for example, whilst one person may view a low volume of work as positive, another person may find this leads to boredom and frustration. The findings revealed three main forms of demand; time related, physical and mental. Overall, levels of job demand amongst the sample were low, particularly in relation to time. When this type of demand did arise it was in the form of isolated incidents as opposed to ongoing concerns, for example, increased volume of work when a colleague was unwell.

There appeared to be gender differences in how participants reported different forms of job-related demands. For example, few men spoke about time-related demands. Older men were more likely than younger men and women of all ages to describe the positive aspects of physical job demands in the context of their wider health. Perhaps unsurprisingly, job type was also found to play a role, with manual and technical workers reporting higher levels of physical job demands than administrative workers. The overall level of mental job demand was low. However, some isolated incidents of high mental job demand were found to impact on participants outside of work.

Three main forms of work-related control were spoken about by participants: control over working hours, control over working practices, and control over the use of skills. To some extent, how participants spoke about these types of control appeared to be gendered, with men being more likely to talk about control over working practices, whereas women were more likely to raise the issue of control over working hours. This may be linked in part to caring responsibilities. Some of the women who spoke about control over working hours did so in the context of temporal²² flexibility. However, this was not exclusively the case.

Participants spoke about control over use of their skills in a variety of ways. Some participants considered themselves overqualified for their job, and found the lack of opportunity to exercise their skills frustrating and a source of stress. However, others

²² Temporal borders divide when tasks can be done, for example set working hours (Clark, 2000); see chapter 2.

expressed a relief in working in a job that involved lower levels of demand and responsibility than previous employment. It is important to consider the wider context within which participants' narratives were situated. Those who articulated frustration were all hoping to move into a field of work which allowed them to exercise their skills in the future. However, the participants who spoke about preferring lower levels of responsibility and thus did not have the opportunity to use their skills to their full extent had, in many cases, applied to work at ResearchOrg due to caring responsibilities or redundancy, and expressed no aspirations for moving out of their current occupation.

Participants spoke about social contact at work in mainly positive ways. However, social contact does not necessarily mean social support. Indeed, a small number of participants spoke about social contact having a negative impact, either as a source of strain leading to conflict outside of work due to high levels of psychological²³ permeability, or through an unwelcome permeability of the boundaries between work and personal life. The majority of participants who spoke positively about social contact and support at work were women, often linking social support to maintaining mental health.

Overall, qualitative reports of job demand and control were low amongst the sample. Participants generally reported low levels of job strain and, as was highlighted in the previous chapter in both the qualitative and quantitative data, high levels of job satisfaction. The incidents reported within the interviews appear to be minority cases, or the result of isolated incidents as opposed to ongoing concerns. However, this does not mean there was no evidence of strain. As one participant stated: "I don't feel stressed in work, I get stressed in running around [...] trying to fit everything else in" (Fiona, admin work). Sources of strain in other areas of life which may lead to work-life imbalance will be explored in the following chapters.

²³ Psychological borders define which thinking patterns, behaviour and emotion are suitable to which domain (Clark, 2000); see chapter 2.

8. Chapter 8: Home and family life and its relationship with other domains

This chapter examines the issue of home and family life amongst the ResearchOrg sample, or to use Clark's (2000) terminology, the 'family domain'. The chapter is framed by the concept that both caring and housework are 'work' (Oakley, 1974). Family work, or 'social reproductive labour' is "as important to the maintenance of society as the productive work that occurs in the formal market economy" (Coltrane, 2000). Many domestic chores that may be classified as 'non-work', such as washing and ironing, can exist both as paid and unpaid labour (Grint, 2005). Furthermore, Erickson (2005) argues that emotional support and care must also be conceptualised as a form of work, in order to understand emotional support as something people (primarily women) do as opposed to what they are: "caregiving, in whatever form, does not just emanate from within, but must be managed, focused, and directed so as to have the intended effect on the care recipient" (Erickson, 2005: p.349). However, what is considered 'work' in relation to caring and housework is subjective; it "is dependent on the specific social circumstances under which such activities are undertaken and, critically, how these circumstances and activities are interpreted by those involved" (Grint, 2005: p.6).

This chapter begins by outlining the diverse range of domestic situations within the sample. It then focuses on three dominant themes: caring responsibilities for children, caring responsibilities for elderly adult relatives, and domestic work.

8.1. Domestic situations

Participants had a diverse range of living situations; fourteen had offspring living at home (ten of which also lived with a partner or spouse), eighteen lived with a partner or spouse, seven lived with parents, eight alone, one with other family members, and two with friends. A further seven lived with their parents, eight alone, four with children but without a partner, one with other family members, and two with friends. Eight participants were immigrant workers with extended family living abroad. Five of the sample cared for an elderly adult relative who lived with them or nearby. These different living arrangements were likely to have had different impacts on participants' experiences of managing work-life balance. For example Grace, who described herself as "a single girl", referred to how she felt living alone allowed her to be involved in a range of leisure activities.

It should also be noted that the household did not necessarily equate to what individuals considered to be their ‘family’ (Finch, 2007). Households are becoming increasingly diverse and complex, with close relationships for many people extending beyond the physical household to friends, past partners, and across countries through migration (Williams, 2004). Whilst for some participants, family was considered to be very much located physically within their home (for example, Kirsty), other participants spoke about close family being abroad (for example, Thomas’ young children lived abroad), or did not feel a particular bond with their household and considered their ‘family’ to live elsewhere (for example, Selma lived with friends, but her close friends lived elsewhere, and her biological family lived abroad). Similarly, family relationships are fluid over time (Finch, 2007). This was evidenced through some older participants describing changes to their family structures, with children leaving home, grandchildren being born, marriages ending, and caring relationships changing.

The main way in which participants spoke about their domestic situations was in relation to caring responsibilities, both for children and for elderly relatives. Caring relationships can take different forms, with there being a distinction between ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ an individual. However, the two concepts are not necessarily linked; one may care for someone without caring about them, and vice versa (Parker, 1981).

8.1.1. Domestic situations: caring for children

Fourteen of the sample had offspring living at home, including twelve with children under the age of eighteen (8 women, 6 men). There appeared to be a division between how women and men spoke about caring for children. The men tended to talk about practical aspects of caring, such as collecting children from school, taking children to sports clubs, and financially providing for their family. Providing in various forms was a theme that arose for many participants, reflecting other research into the role of fathers in family life (for example see discussion in Cohen, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1989).

“Because I’m studying for our better future, I think my wife really likes it because I won’t be in a [manual] job for the rest of my life, and we will have a car and I’ll be productive. And for my daughter and my son, I want to work for them too.”

(Jack, 38, lived with wife and 2 primary school aged children, family abroad, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

For other men the concept of providing was broader. Bill, who cared for his son alone following the death of his wife, spoke about changing jobs so he could more adequately care for his son and take him to sports matches, whilst Michael, unusually, described getting his son ready for school and taking him to crèche. This difference may be due to Michael's family circumstances; his extended family lived abroad, and he described how in his home country they would play a major role in caring for a child.

For many of the mothers in the sample, being a parent was a major part of their identity. For example, Denise stated:

“I don't see myself as a wife, I see myself as a parent.”

(Denise, 29, lived with husband and pre-school child, technical, full-time)

Other women spoke about this in a more explicitly gendered way, describing what they felt it meant to be a mother:

“The mother bit comes in right from the word go [...] you've got the bond there straight away [...] all the time you're thinking about your children [...] My mum told me it's worse the older the children get so I know what I've got to look forward to.”

(Hilda, 57, lived with husband and teenage child, technical, full-time)

Hilda also spoke about the difference she had noticed between her husband's and her own perspective in relation to being a parent and problems they had experienced with their son when he was a teenager. She described his way of caring as “different” and questioned whether this way of being a parent is different for “all men”.

Some participants spoke about guilt associated with being a parent:

“If you're a parent as soon as they're born you feel guilty that you're not doing what you should be doing.”

(Natasha, 44, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, admin, full-time)

Both Natasha and Tasmin stated that they felt working and having something independent of the household made them ‘better’ parents. They presented being a ‘good’ parent in the context of being happy as an individual and therefore able to fulfil their parental duties. For example, when talking about her interpretation of the concept of work-life balance, Natasha spoke about being happy and “doing the right amount” of work as enabling her to

be a “better” and “decent” parent, both through spending time with, and by providing for, her family:

“If you’re happy in your work you’re actually a better parent. That’s why people have to go back to work; some people need to do that to make them decent people so that they’re decent parents. Happy at work, balanced as in you’re happy, you’re spending the right amount of time there and you’ve got enough money to be happy.”

(Natasha, 44, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, admin, full-time)

Tasmin framed this tension in the context of her own wellbeing, describing the importance of paid employment as a form of independence. Whilst recognising the work she had carried out raising her children, she acknowledged that the experience made her feel as if she was “losing” herself “as a person”. At a later point in the interview she described the difference her work made to her as a parent, for example making her “less snappy” with her children:

“I think [being at work] is really finding yourself as a person. You’re not a title anymore, you’re not ‘Jason’s mum’, ‘Clare’s mum’. You’ve got your title and you’re doing something of your own accord.”

(Tasmin, 43, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, cared for elderly mother who lives nearby, technical, full-time)

However, not all participants spoke about the intersection between caring for children and paid employment in this way. For example, Cathy’s perception of being a ‘good’ parent was related to her experience of childhood when her parents were “always around”. She contrasted this ideal with her own experience of being in full-time paid employment:

“[Working full-time is] far from ideal. I would like to be able to, financially, get a job where I’m only doing a few hours a day so I can be at home. I hate it that they’re latchkey kids [...] I’ve gotta try and keep to the company rules and do my hours but try and get home to them. Of course it doesn’t work, I can’t juggle both [...] my parents were always around for me and I think there are far too many children now whose parents aren’t there for them. I’d like to be at home.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

One of the men also expressed guilt due to the tension between caring for his children and the demands of paid employment. Adam lived an hour from his workplace as he was unable to afford houses in the local area. Throughout the interview he spoke about the difficulty this caused him due to the cost of petrol and the logistical problems of collecting his children from school:

“Poor little lad, I boot him out of bed at half six in the morning and stick him in the car at seven o’clock [...] it doesn’t seem quite right for him to have to do all that just because houses are cheaper over there. And then he will get to school and say ‘so-and-so’s asked me if I can go to their house for tea’. But then I’m here and I can’t afford or have time to drive back there and then come back and collect him because obviously all the people who go to the school all live round there.”

(Adam, 37, lived with partner and 2 teenage children, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

Adam’s narrative has some similarities to the female participants quoted, in that he reported feeling guilty due to the intersection between paid employment and caring responsibilities, and therefore not able to fulfil the practical tasks associated with caring, such as collecting his son from school. However, it differs in that the women who spoke about guilt did so in a broader, emotional way. For example, Cathy spoke about wanting to be “there” for her children:

“The two months I was off [on sick leave] the children loved it cos I was at home when they got in. Not that they particularly needed me, they go ‘oh hi mum’ and go and sit on the computer, but I was there.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

Other participants without children living at home with them also spoke about various aspects of being a parent. For example, Fred spoke about wanting to “settle down”:

“What one person perceives as stressful, the other person perceives as unwinding. For example, one day when I get married and have kids, come home from work, I’ve had a stressful day, you’ve got to help the kids with their homework, give your wife attention, help with the cooking, help with the cleaning, help with everything. To some people that’s stressful but I think that would be actually be unwinding, cos that’s what life’s about.”

(Fred, 26, lived alone, family abroad, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

8.1.2. Domestic situations: caring for an elderly adult relative

Five of the sample had caring responsibilities for an elderly adult relative who either lived with them or nearby (3 women, 2 men). All these participants spoke about the impact this had on their lives and their health. For example, Laura described losing sleep due to being worried about her aunt moving into a nursing home. Marion spoke about the impact caring for her grandmother had on her own health, particularly in the form of stress and chronic tiredness due to combining this caring responsibility with paid employment and studying.

Two men, Ken and Neil, reported caring for their elderly mothers. Their narratives about combining caring responsibilities with paid employment were similar to that of the female participants. Both men described how caring responsibilities impacted on their lives. For example, Neil reported how concern for his mother following his father's recent death affected him at work:

“My mum's not very good so we have to do everything. You come to work but you're not really with it, you're still kind of switched off. It's good to come in but sometimes your heart's not really here.”

(Neil, 40, lived with mother and brother, cared for mother, manual, full-time)

He later described how being one of the main carers for his mother had affected his sleep patterns, opportunities to socialise, led him to drink more alcohol, and affected his moods.

8.2. Domestic work

It is well documented that, whilst there have been increasing numbers of women within paid employment in the UK throughout the twentieth century (Hogarth et al., 2001a), women continue to spend more time on domestic tasks than men (Doucet, 1995; Summerfield & Babb, 2004). However, in order to better understand the psychological and emotional, as well as the physical consequences of division of labour within the home, it is important to examine who retains responsibility for housework alongside the allocation and time spent on tasks (McKie, Bowlby, & Gregory, 1999).

This section is framed by Hochschild and Machung's (1989) analysis of 'gender strategies' within the household. Gender strategies are the cultural norms regarding "manhood and womanhood" (p.15) which individuals draw on to form how they think, feel and act in relation to different situations. Participants were divided into two broad groups; those who spoke about 'more traditional' domestic arrangements (where women were described as

having the majority control and/or spend the majority of time on domestic work), and those who spoke about ‘less traditional’ (participants who reported a more equal division of labour and/or responsibility, or men having the majority control and/or time spent on domestic tasks; ‘egalitarian’).

It should be noted that many participants in the ResearchOrg sample did not talk in detail about domestic work. This may be because of differing living arrangements whereby the gendered division of labour was not as obvious as for those who lived with their opposite-sex partner; for example, participants living with their parents may not have entered into negotiations regarding domestic work in the same way those living as a couple had. Alternatively, it may be because the gendered arrangements were considered so ‘taken for granted’ that they were not raised within the context of the interview.

8.2.1. Domestic work: ‘more traditional’ arrangements

Some participants’ narratives suggested ‘more traditional’ arrangements for domestic work. The majority of these participants were women. In some cases domestic labour was described as burdensome. For example, Cathy spoke about the domestic tasks she carried out in the evenings and at weekends, describing the physical and emotional impact it had on her:

“I come home from work and think ‘oh god, what have I got to do?’ My weekends are filled up with washing uniforms and tidying the house. That can be a drain sometimes.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

Cathy’s narrative (“what have I got to do?”) implied a level of obligation regarding the ‘dual burden’ (Gershuny, Godwin, & Jones, 1994) of paid employment and housework.

Marion described both carrying out and “having control” of the housework. Whilst she acknowledged her male partner was “a bit of a help” with some tasks, and carried out the chores when she was unwell, she described him as a “typical man”. However, she also described finding “satisfaction” in maintaining a clean house. This raises the question of pleasure which may be gleaned from domestic work. Empirical definitions of tasks often assume they have “one predominate meaning” (VanEvery, 1997: p.412), either being classified as ‘work’ (assumed to be implicitly unpleasant) or ‘leisure’ (assumed to be implicitly enjoyable). However, these assumptions do not allow for individuals finding some satisfaction in housework. Whilst this does not necessarily mean Marion was

satisfied with the status quo (indeed, towards the end of the extract she stated “it’d be nice if he did a wee bit extra”), it is important that an analysis of domestic work recognises the perhaps seemingly contradictory strands of obligation, burden, control, and satisfaction that may occur within this process.

Aspects of domestic work considered satisfying or dissatisfying by ResearchOrg participants often paralleled their feelings about paid employment (Oakley, 1974). For example, skills developed in one domain could be transferred to another. Tasmin spoke about how she was able to transfer the skills she had developed from “doing all the practical things round the house” to the manual aspects of her work as a technical employee. Elsa spoke about how she used the organisational skills from her previous work as an office manager in her domestic work:

“I’m a very organised person because I was in charge of an office with five people under me, so I think that was good grooming because you had to keep everything in some sort of order. I still do the same things today in the house. I do the Hoovering one day, clean the bathrooms and toilets another day, do something else another day.”

(Elsa, 61, lived with husband, technical, part-time)

The issue of control over domestic work, alongside the physical tasks of actually doing it, was crucial in a number of narratives. For example, Marion reported “having control over keeping everything clean and tidy”. Tasmin talked about this process to a greater degree, describing herself as taking on a “woman’s role”, yet also as someone who “has to be the organiser”. She spoke about “commandeering” tasks around the home so that her male partner had “no choice” but allow her to both have control and carry out the majority of domestic work. Both Marion and Tasmin asked their male partners to ‘help’ with tasks, indicating it remained their responsibility, whilst men retained a choice about domestic work (Connell, 2005). This was evident in some of the older womens’ narratives. For example, Kirsty contrasted her husband with men in a younger generation, stating:

“He’s pretty good as guys go. Not as good as the son-in-laws, because they all look after themselves now, don’t they? [...] He’s pretty good for an old man.”

(Kirsty, 61, lived with husband, technical, full-time)

Only one man, Adam, spoke about ‘more traditional’ division of labour. He described his female partner doing “everything” whilst he took on the “blokey things”, stating it was “traditional in a way”.

“I’m pretty lucky really, she does everything except for the blokey things that she probably couldn’t do. But even if she could, what’s the point? I know how to wire up the cooker and change a fuse; I can do it in half the time. I suppose it’s traditional in a way.”

(Adam, 37, lived with partner and 2 teenage children, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

However, he later raised issues regarding understandings of domestic equality:

“The things I do are more skilled and take longer. So even though it’s not a daily thing, if I have to re-do the bathroom or something you’d be looking at two months worth of work. And all the stuff like carrying anything heavy. It works out alright. I ferry the kids around probably more than she does, but then she makes their dinner. It’s reasonably equal I suppose.”

Whilst Adam described a fairly traditional model of domestic work, with his female partner taking on tasks such as preparing the dinner, he described their contribution as “reasonably equal” due to the skilled nature of the tasks he did undertake. This example indicates the need to better understand the meanings women and men place upon their domestic division of labour (Doucet, 1995).

8.2.2. Domestic work: ‘less traditional’ arrangements

A small number of participants reported having ‘less traditional’ arrangements regarding domestic work. These involved either a more egalitarian division of domestic labour, or domestic arrangements outside ‘traditional’ gender norms.

Only one woman, Yvonne, spoke about experiencing ‘less traditional’ domestic work arrangements. Yvonne is different to the women in the section above, as she lived with her parents and brother as opposed to a male partner. She described previously “playing mum” to the household, but had raised the issue of the division of labour within the household when she was ill and unable to work:

“I’d felt for a long time that I was doing a lot of it, almost like playing mum to everyone indoors. That’s changed a lot, the cooking side, the dinner, the ironing,

tidying up, things like that have changed for the better. [...] If you all work you've all got to help each other and chip in, especially if you're not getting home till gone six at night."

(Yvonne, 26, lived with parents and brother, admin, full-time)

The other participants who spoke about 'less traditional' domestic work arrangements were men. Peter spoke about generational changes in his experience of the division of labour, contrasting his current situation with his childhood where his parents had a more 'traditional' gender strategy:

"We share [the housework] out. I was brought up by a mother who was a housewife. When my dad came in from work or we came in from school the meal was on the table and she would do everything, whereas with both of us working you realise you've actually got to do your bit as well."

(Peter, 59, lived with wife and adult child, manual, full-time)

Ian's narrative is more unusual in that he began by describing what may be viewed as a 'more traditional' arrangement:

"It doesn't matter what time I come in, there's always a hot meal made for me."

(Ian, 63, lived with wife, manual, full-time, also worked part-time)

However, he later described his wife taking on what may be viewed as more traditionally masculine tasks around the home:

"She hasn't got any mechanical engineering training whatsoever but the other year the washing machine broke down and she had the pump out and goodness knows what else and she put it right. She's extremely capable. She doesn't need me so much on the practical front perhaps as some ladies might in their marriage."

8.3. Chapter summary

The participants in the sample had a diverse range of domestic situations. This study differs from many examinations of work-life balance in being an occupational study that included participants with and without caring responsibilities. By incorporating a sample with diverse personal situations, it allows an understanding of home and the family that goes beyond that of physical household borders. For some participants, 'family' was

considered to be the biological family with whom they lived, whereas for others ‘family’ included extended family, friends, and family members abroad.

Beyond the diversity of home and family situations, this chapter focused on two forms of caring within the sample; caring for children, and for elderly relatives. There were both similarities and differences in how women and men in the sample spoke about their parenting roles. Both sexes spoke about practical aspects of caring, such as collecting children from school, taking them to extra-curricular activities, and financially providing for them. However, the women also spoke about identity issues regarding being a parent, indicating that constructions of parenting were gendered. There were also differences among women in relation to constructs of being a ‘good’ parent; some described the independence gained through paid employment which enabled them to be ‘good’ parents through improvement to their own wellbeing, whereas others felt they would be better parents (mothers) if they were able to be at home caring for their children rather than at work.

A small proportion of the sample reported having caring responsibilities for an elderly relative. In all these cases, participants reported it affecting them in other spheres of their lives, particularly in relation to health. Examples of this include being unable to sleep, feeling ‘shattered’, and not being able to concentrate at work. There did not appear to be a gender difference in how participants reported these caring responsibilities or their effects.

The majority of participants who reported ‘more traditional’ domestic arrangements were women, indicating that gender norms remained strong within the family domain. Whilst some presented this as a burden, others reported a level of satisfaction in maintaining control over household domestic work. Of the small number of participants who reported ‘less traditional’ arrangements, the majority were men. However, as Hochschild and Machung (1989) note, it may be possible that there was a disjuncture between what participants reported doing and what they actually did, what they said they believed and how they felt about these roles, with some participants in her study appearing “egalitarian ‘on top’ but traditional ‘underneath’” (Hochschild & Machung, 1989: p.16).

This chapter has highlighted the diversity of domestic situations in the sample. It has outlined how participants spoke the ‘family’ domain, in particular the dominant themes of care and domestic work. It has identified some of the main differences and similarities within the sample, particularly in relation to gender. Finally, where relevant, it has identified instances where participants related their home and family life to their health. In

doing so it not only presented further context for the sample alongside that of paid employment, but it also identified areas of home and family life which may be considered a strain. For example, all the participants with caring responsibilities for an elderly relative reported negative health effects, whereas only some participants with caring responsibilities for children reported a similar strain. This strain may contribute to work-life imbalance. However, before this is explored further, the third sphere of leisure will be examined within the next chapter.

9. Chapter 9: Leisure and its relationship with other domains

This chapter addresses the issue of 'leisure'. Recognising that boundaries surrounding the leisure domain are highly permeable, and the subjective nature of the boundary between the 'family' domain and many leisure activities, this chapter aims to gain a better understanding of the meanings of leisure to participants. Where relevant, the impact of gender, and associations made between leisure and health, are explored.

9.1. Definitions of leisure

Definitions of leisure vary. For example, Mattingly and Bianchi (2003) define 'free time' (which they used interchangeably with 'leisure') as "time not committed to market work, domestic caregiving, or personal care" (p.1000). However, further investigation revealed nuances in the definition. Dumazedier (1974) suggests that leisure can be viewed as a style of behaviour which may occur in any sphere of life (for example, listening to music whilst working, or watching television whilst cooking dinner for the family), as non-work (i.e. leisure can only exist if work exists), or as a form of self-fulfilment (leisure for leisure's sake: an "intrinsically motivated activity which is neither instrumental nor goal-orientated" (Shaw, 1997: p.99)).

There are a variety of understandings of different types of leisure. For example, 'family leisure' can be defined as "the time that parents and children spend together in free time or recreational activities" (Shaw, 1997: p.98), whilst a hobby can be considered a pursuit which is "interesting and enjoyable because of its durable benefits" (Goff & Fick, 1997: p.48), enabling the 'hobbyist' to acquire skills and knowledge.

Other definitions of leisure sub-categories define the nature of the activity. For example, 'formal leisure' (Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004) includes participation in formalised activities or attending events arranged by organisations (for example, sports, cultural events, church, or adult education) whilst 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 1992) can be defined as a "systematic pursuit of a substantial and interesting leisure activity that is characterized by acquisition and expression of special skills and knowledge" (Goff & Fick, 1997: p.47). 'Serious' or 'formal' leisure can include activities such as being a member of the Sea Cadets Corps (Raisborough, 2006) and running (Goff & Fick, 1997). For the purposes of this analysis, this type of leisure is referred to as 'organised' leisure.

Regardless of definition, the distinction between leisure and other domains is often blurred (Finchman, 2008; Grint, 2005). Leisure is subjective, and thereby different experiences may be classified in different ways by different people. For example, 'family leisure' may be experienced in different ways by different family members (Larson, Gillman, & Richards, 1997). Similarly, leisure is not necessarily restricted by physical borders; indeed some activities may take place within the work and/or family domain, for example socialising with work colleagues, or attending sporting events with offspring.

Combining paid employment with family life can limit leisure time (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004; Stebbins, 1992). Interactions between paid employment and leisure can result in 'role strain' or 'role enhancement' (Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004). The 'time availability perspective' (role strain) views time as a limited resource, with individuals allocating time to different spheres (work, family, leisure) according to their priorities and social roles. Conversely, the concept of 'time deepening' (role enhancement) states that "busy people figure out how to use their time efficiently, deepening and expanding their leisure experiences by finding ways to combine leisure and nonleisure activities or increasing the quality of their leisure time by doing more than one leisure activity simultaneously" (Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004: p.414).

However, different types of leisure may be affected and even enhanced by competing demands in different ways (Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004). For example, paid employment may be a way of facilitating leisure through greater access to income and resources, and may lead to social situations through meeting co-workers. Similarly, families may expand social networks by meeting the parents of offsprings' school friends, or meeting a partner's acquaintances. Shared leisure activities, such as television watching, may not be curtailed in the same way by work and family commitments as individual leisure pursuits such as exercise, as they blur the boundaries between domains and are therefore prioritised in a different way.

Gender has been found to play an important part in access to, and use of, leisure. Feminists have questioned the notion of 'free' time, challenging the model of understanding leisure primarily in relation to paid employment, and placing patriarchy as a structural condition of leisure alongside earlier class-based analysis (Carrington, 2008; Deem, 1986). Women tend to have less available time for leisure activities such as exercise (Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004) and less 'uncontaminated' free time (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003). Furthermore, women and men may experience leisure time differently due to gendered

caring roles (Larson et al., 1997; Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003). However, simple comparisons between women and men fail to fully understand the complexities behind leisure related decisions, such as the different meanings that are given to leisure and how these decisions and experiences are constructed within and against the confines of gender norms (Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Raisborough, 2006).

Whilst participants placed different emphasis on leisure within their narratives, one factor was constant; the borders surrounding the ‘leisure’ domain were far more permeable and flexible than that of paid work and family. Without exception, work and family concerns were allowed to permeate into the leisure domain to a greater extent than leisure was allowed to permeate into, or conflict with, work or family.

9.2. Leisure: what people did in their ‘free’ time

Many narratives about leisure were descriptions of what participants did in their ‘free’ time. All participants were asked what they did outside of work time (usually in the evenings and at weekends, although for participants who worked atypical hours²⁴ the question was adjusted appropriately).

Leisure activities included exercise (e.g. going to the gym, walking, running, yoga, and team sports such as football and being a member of a cycling club), ‘me’ time (e.g. having a bath, or enjoying a glass of wine alone in the garden), socialising (with family, friends, and colleagues), volunteering, and ‘organised’ activities (e.g. playing in an orchestra, taking part in amateur dramatic productions, and adult education classes). Many participants described activities such as watching television and simply being in their house. For the purposes of this analysis, this has been termed ‘routine’ leisure.

9.3. Blurring the boundaries: family leisure

There were two specific ways in which participants blurred the boundaries between leisure and paid employment, or between leisure and family life; family leisure (as discussed in this section) and socialising at work (as discussed in chapter 6). Some participants with caring responsibilities spoke about leisure primarily in relation to their offspring. For example, Alice described how her afternoons and evenings were structured around her children’s extra-curricular activities:

²⁴ Atypical hours are defined as working before 8am, after 7pm, or at weekends, not including overtime.

“The younger one does computer club on a Monday after school so she doesn’t come out till half-three. The older one does hockey on a Tuesday which doesn’t come out till five, and then the younger one does horse riding on a Wednesday and she doesn’t get back to home till five, so sometimes I’ve got one of them and then I’ve got to either hang around or do something and then go back for the other one. Then in the evenings there’s Brownies on Tuesday and swimming on Thursday, so it’s straight home from school, dinner, change, homework, then back out for something. [...] I don’t do much through the week generally on Monday to Friday.”

(Alice, 45, lived with 2 primary school aged children, admin, part-time)

Later Alice spoke about how the main time she had to herself or to socialise was when her ex-husband was caring for the children every other weekend, and, until recently, when her parents looked after the children. However, she often used this time to carry out domestic work.

Bill also spoke about the majority of his ‘free’ time being involved in leisure activities related to his son:

“I’ll take my son to rugby training one night a week, and then at weekends during the winter he plays rugby for a club so I’ll take him, but I take a real interest in that. During the summer he plays cricket so I get involved in that by scoring for his team. The summer is busy at weekends because my son plays on a Saturday and a Sunday, and has training during the week, so I’m kept quite occupied.”

(Bill, 60, lived with teenage child, manual, full-time)

The borders between the leisure and family domains took on different forms for Alice and Bill. For Alice, leisure was infringed on by family due to facilitating her children’s leisure. However, Bill’s shared interests with his son allowed him to participate in ‘family leisure’, thereby blurring the boundary between the family and leisure domains. There may be a gendered dimension to this relationship. Whilst both women and men spoke about family infringing on leisure as Alice did (for example, Adam spoke about driving his children to and from their friends’ houses, and Jack spoke about helping his children with their homework), it was primarily the men who spoke about boundaries being blurred due to shared, organised leisure (for example, Peter spoke about becoming a school governor, and being involved in his children’s swimming team). This raises questions regarding the gendered nature of boundaries surrounding leisure, suggesting that men may have firmer

boundaries, whereas women, particularly those with caring responsibilities, were more likely to have their leisure domain compromised by family.

9.4. Importance attached to leisure within participants' narratives

Participants fell into three broad categories: those who prioritised leisure, those who experienced restrictions to leisure, and those who spoke of 'routine' leisure.

9.4.1. Importance attached to leisure: prioritising leisure

Some participants placed a high level of importance upon leisure. In many occasions this took the form of a fairly structured leisure activity. For example, Grace spoke about her involvement in a local amateur dramatics group and her church, and Will spoke about regularly going hill walking. Many of these accounts were fairly descriptive. These participants, who mainly did not have caring responsibilities or other time pressures such as a second job or studying, were perhaps more able to prioritise leisure in their 'off-job' time.

For those with caring responsibilities who did prioritise leisure, such as Natasha and Debbie, it often took the form of independence or a coping strategy. For example, Natasha spoke in detail about the importance of playing a musical instrument and recently joining an orchestra. Until recently, her leisure time had been constrained due to family and work commitments. Having previously worked as a childminder for many years, she began to experience mental health problems which she described as leading her to make a number of changes to her work, home, and leisure practices. To this end she joined an orchestra and spoke passionately about the importance of it in her life:

“I knew that I wanted to do something for me and I knew it wouldn't be work-related.”

(Natasha, 44, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, admin, full-time)

However, despite describing gaining some independence through music, Natasha also spoke about experiencing guilt as a result of being away from her family:

“I'm at orchestra and I'm thinking 'I've got to be home now'. It's guilt; I shouldn't be doing my own thing, I should still be there. I know it's ridiculous. I'm an adult, I've done my bit of being at home and now it's my turn. They're all supportive of me, but if you're not there when you think you should be then you feel guilty.”

The focus of this guilt is interesting. Whilst Natasha spoke about feeling guilty about spending time outside of paid work doing her “own thing”, she did not talk about feeling guilty about being in paid employment in the same way that other participants did. This may be due to differing conceptualisations of necessity; Natasha viewed paid employment as necessary due to the income she earned, but saw her leisure as a non-essential activity. However, Cathy spoke about mothers not working in the context of her own childhood when her parents were “always around”. This contrast was also evident within the narratives surrounding leisure. For example, Michael, who worked shifts as a manual worker, spoke about considering his time outside of work to be “really valuable” due to his irregular working hours, having to “do everything a normal person would do every evening crammed into two days”. He spoke about having two main leisure activities - football and comic books - and spent the majority of his ‘off-job’ time playing, watching, or coaching football. One of the key differences between Michael’s and Natasha’s narratives was the focus of the guilt they expressed at not being at home with their family. For Natasha this was caused by participating in the orchestra, whereas for Michael it was paid employment which took him away from his family. It is possible that for Natasha and Michael the concept of ‘free’ time differed, with Michael regarding his leisure time as a given but his atypical working hours not so, whereas Natasha regarded her leisure time as more flexible. For other participants, leisure was prioritised due to its positive mental health benefits. For example, Debbie spoke about going swimming as a way of relaxing when she was “mentally tired”:

“The physical activity really relaxes me. Also, feeling really physically tired, when you go to bed all your muscles relax. I try to go once a week when I have time.”

(Debbie, 22, lived with friends, family abroad, technical, part-time, also studied full-time)

Rachel also spoke about using sport to combat stress:

“I think it de-stresses you, sport, definitely. I find if I have a couple of weeks off from the gym I’m grumpy, I don’t concentrate, I don’t sleep as well. I think I need to do an exercise to knock me out.”

(Rachel, 30, lived alone, manual, full-time)

Sometimes leisure was about relaxation rather than activity; Rachel also spoke about the importance of having ‘Rachel time’:

“I used to get stressed-out and irrational, so for me own benefit I’ve made what my friends call ‘Rachel Time’. They’ll say ‘what you doing this weekend?’ and I’m like, ‘it’s Rachel Time’. Whereas I never did that before cos I felt selfish, but now I don’t cos I feel it’s doing me a favour.”

(Rachel, 30, lived alone, manual, full-time)

9.4.2. Importance attached to leisure: restrictions on leisure

Some participants spoke about restrictions on their leisure time, either due to work-life imbalance preventing leisure, or conflict arising from attempting to prioritise leisure. These were mainly participants who experienced excess permeation of work/family/leisure boundaries through multiple roles. For example, both Michael and Yvonne spoke about paid employment limiting their leisure time in different ways. Michael worked shifts, and described how his hours of work limited time available for physical activity. Yvonne also described how paid employment limited her opportunities to exercise:

“I do occasionally go swimming or to the gym with my friend [...] we have got quite a nice gym just along the street [from work] but I don’t like the prospect of going there because it’s another hour [after work] and then it’s another hour and a half to get home, so that makes the evening even shorter at that end.”

(Yvonne, 26, lived with parents and brother, admin, full-time)

Tiredness appeared to be a limiting factor. In some cases this was expressed as resulting from paid employment. In other situations, commitments outside of paid employment, or combining paid employment with other areas of life, led to tiredness which limited leisure time. In the majority of cases this was in relation to caring responsibilities. Like Alice, who spoke about how the majority of her ‘off-job’ time was spent caring for her daughters, Fiona also described busy evenings when her children were younger:

“The first thing to do was to sort the children out – empty their lunchboxes, unpack their schoolbags, get their tea, get them in the bath. Then about half-past eight it’s bed time. At nine o’clock I’ll sit down and watch telly or something, iron and do other jobs; what most people do in the evenings.”

(Fiona, 35, lived with 2 teenager children, admin, full-time)

The phrase “what most people do in the evenings” is interesting, and similar to how many participants described their time outside of paid employment. This area will be further explored in the next section.

The experience of having leisure time limited by caring responsibilities and domestic work on some occasions led to conflict. For example, Tasmin discussed her dilemma of wanting a leisure activity “detached from everything else”, but at the same time feeling guilty for spending time away from her husband and children:

“A lady who works at ResearchOrg has started evening classes. She’s saying ‘it’s really good having something else to focus on’ and I think I could do something like that, something that I enjoy doing that’s detached from everything else. But then I think if I spread myself thin it’ll be even harder to get things done [...] I feel guilt because I’m not home when the children get back from school, I’ve already left for work when they get up.”

(Tasmin, 43, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, cared for elderly mother who lived nearby, technical, full-time)

Whilst the majority of participants who spoke about work-life imbalance limiting their leisure time were women with caring responsibilities, two men also raised this issue. Ken, who cared for his elderly mother, spoke about how his responsibilities limited his leisure time:

“I used to play golf but I don’t so much now, don’t have time. At the moment I need to help my Mum. I do all the shopping and stuff like that. She can’t cope with doing too much, so I cut the grass, that kind of thing. Often I’m helping Mum out.”

(Ken, 48, lived with elderly mother, cared for mother, manual, full-time)

In a small number of cases combining paid employment with other commitments led to a lack of leisure. Selma described feeling guilty if she did not spend her ‘off-job’ time studying. Whilst Selma’s guilt arose from her commitment to studying as opposed to childcare, Selma’s and Tasmin’s narratives are similar in that both described the tension between feeling they ‘should’ have time-off, something for themselves, and their commitment to family or studying.

“When I’m doing my course I haven’t had much time to do other things. Maybe I should try to take a day-off, but then I feel guilty and sometimes I’m really tired and I don’t do one thing or the other.”

(Selma, 40, lived with friends, family abroad, admin, full-time, also studied part-time)

Some participants spoke about how financial issues impacted on their leisure time. In other cases it was the need to save money which limited leisure. Neil spoke about the “social implications” of this:

“My long term goal is to be able to afford a place so I’m trying to save all the time. Obviously that has social implications because I can’t afford to do some of the normal things that people do.”

(Neil, 40, lived with mother and brother, cared for mother, manual, full-time)

However, there appeared a level of acceptance regarding leisure time being limited by a range of factors. Yvonne’s narrative highlighted this:

“I think we would all like to not have to balance personal life, to have to fit it in and all the things you want to do around work, but that’s just life. Because if you don’t work, you don’t earn money, and then you can’t do the things you want.”

(Yvonne, 26, lived with parents and brother, admin, full-time)

Some participants described conflict arising from trying to prioritise leisure time (‘work-family-leisure’ conflict). For example, Alice spoke about it being “too much stress” to try and balance exercise classes alongside her part-time job at ResearchOrg and caring for her two daughters, and had therefore forgone leisure in order to minimise stress:

“It’s just too much stress to try and do anything like that regularly. Even with the hours I work here I couldn’t fit in a class or anything between work and school. All the lunchtime ones start at twelve and it’s too late. I could go to the gym or swimming, but it’s just always too much rushing around.”

(Alice, 45, lived with 2 primary school aged children, admin, part-time)

9.4.3. Importance attached to leisure: routine leisure

Many participants only spoke about leisure in passing. Phrases such as “I don’t do nothing” (Lee, 53, lives alone, manual, full-time) and “nothing really” (Guy, 60, lives alone, manual, full-time, also works part-time) were common when participants were asked what they did outside work. Furthermore, some participants spoke about their leisure in a descriptive, ‘routine’ way. Watching television and simply being at home in the

evening was spoken about by many participants. For these participants, their leisure time may have been viewed as so routine it did not merit discussion.

9.5. Chapter summary

There was diversity in reported leisure activities, with some participants describing active, 'organised' pursuits, whilst others presented more 'routine' pastimes. In some cases the leisure domain had firm boundaries around it, particularly for participants who prioritised leisure, whereas for others the boundaries were blurred (leisure took place in other domains, for example through family leisure or socialising at work) or highly permeable (other domains 'intruding' on leisure), making leisure a constantly changing and often compromised domain.

The borders between which leisure was located were flexible. In particular, this related to family leisure and socialising at, or through, paid employment (as explored in chapter 6). There appeared to be gendered differences in how participants experienced family leisure. Whilst both men and women spoke about spending their 'off-job' time doing practical tasks for their children and domestic work, only men spoke about actively integrating their offsprings' pastimes with their own, for example through becoming a school governor or assisting with sporting activities.

Many of the accounts given by participants who presented leisure as a priority were descriptive, regarding the organised activities they participated in. This may be because these participants' 'free' time had not been challenged in the same way as for those who situated leisure more centrally to their narrative. A small number of participants presented leisure as a form of independence. For others, leisure was prioritised due to its relaxing nature, and used as an anti-stress strategy.

Some participants spoke about guilt in relation to prioritising leisure. There was an interesting division between those who felt guilty about prioritising paid employment as it took time away from the family, and those who problematised leisure for similar reasons. This may be due to gendered concepts of necessity and entitlement, with some regarding their leisure time as a given (therefore surrounded by firm boundaries), whereas others experienced this domain as more flexible, with other factors such as caring responsibilities being prioritised above leisure. Furthermore, for some participants there was a contradiction between what they wanted to do and what they felt they 'should' be doing,

with guilt being expressed if they did not do what they felt they 'should' be doing. This was particularly evident in a small number of the female participants' narratives.

Other participants spoke about restrictions to leisure, either due to work-life imbalance, or conflict arising from attempting to prioritise leisure. Some participants saw paid employment as being the main limiting factor on their leisure time. In other cases tiredness was spoken about as the limiting factor, either as a result of work, or due to combining work with family commitments. In other situations it was the domestic domain which limited leisure time, particularly for the working mothers in the sample who described much of their 'off-job' time as being taken up by caring responsibilities and domestic work.

Furthermore, a degree of 'work-family-leisure' conflict was reported, whereby participants had limited their leisure time due to the conflict and as a result, stress, which had arisen from trying to prioritise leisure within their lives. This was particularly evident for female participants with caring responsibilities, although may have also been implicit behind a number of participants' narratives and not commented on.

Whilst participants placed differing importance on leisure within their narratives, one overarching theme was evident; the borders surrounding the leisure domain were far more permeable and flexible than that of work and family. Without exception, work and family concerns were allowed to permeate the leisure domain to a greater extent than leisure was allowed to permeate or conflict with work and family. Some participants expressed a level of dissatisfaction with this, whilst for others paid employment was the priority.

10. Chapter 10: Work-life balance

Previous chapters have explored experiences of work, family, and leisure. This chapter examines reported work-life balance (the balance or imbalance between these domains). As outlined in chapter 5, the questionnaire data found that ResearchOrg employees reported relatively low work-to-family and family-to-work conflict compared to a study of white-collar workers in the UK (Chandola et al., 2004). There were no gender differences, but job type was found to be associated with work-to-family conflict, with manual workers reporting more conflict than administrative workers. Respondents with children reported higher levels of family-to-work conflict than those without. The qualitative data discussed in this chapter aims to explore the meanings behind these quantitative findings.

The chapter focuses on several components of work-life balance: reports of balance and imbalance; flexibility; permeability; and strategies for obtaining and maintaining work-life balance. Where relevant it examines the gendered nature of reported work-life balance, and how health was referred to within the narratives.

10.1. The juggling act: balance and imbalance

Towards the end of most interviews participants were asked what they understood the phrase ‘work-life balance’ to mean. Most, unsurprisingly, spoke about trying to achieve a balance in their lives. For example, Colin stated “you’ve got to have a balance between work and your own time” and Grace described it as being “a balance between life and work and leisure time.” In many cases paid work was problematised as being the main ‘time squeeze’²⁵ on other areas of life: “work shouldn’t be everything” (Andy). In these instances, participants described cases of work-life imbalance (as opposed to balance), often citing paid employment as the main cause. For example, Natasha described imbalance as:

“working too much and not spending enough time at home with family, not having enough time for yourself. [...] I think it’s to do with doing the right amount of work, being happy in your work.”

²⁵ The ‘time squeeze’ is defined as shortage of time combined with the quickening pace of contemporary life, meaning people “no longer find the time to complete the tasks and activities most important to them” (Southerton & Tomlinson, 2005: p.215).

(Natasha, 44, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, admin, full-time)

This section explores reported experiences of work-life balance and imbalance amongst the sample.

10.1.1. The juggling act: Balance

Many studies of work-life balance focus primarily on imbalance in employees' lives (Eby et al., 2005; Guest, 2002), with few examining the presence of balance (for exceptions see Grzywacz, 2000; O'Driscoll et al., 1992). Evidence for positive overspill in the form of transferable skills was found in some participants' narratives. For example, Elsa spoke about how organisational skills she had gained in her previous job were beneficial in her home life, and Tasmin described the similarities between the manual nature of her domestic and paid work.

Alongside transferable skills, participants spoke about balance in different ways: comparing their current situation to a previous one; availability of time; home-related issues; and work-related issues.

10.1.1.1. Balance: comparisons

Several participants spoke about their lives being better 'balanced' now than they were previously. Gender differences were evident in these comparisons, with men being more likely to compare their job at the time of interview with previous employment, and women comparing their situation to when their children were younger.

These men, who were all in full-time manual jobs, spoke about their working hours and lack of work-related stress being more compatible with their personal lives than in previous jobs. For example, Adam described previously working on a building site whereby he was expected to continue working until his tasks were done, as opposed to finishing at a set time. Peter reported that the set working hours and relatively low-stress nature of his work at ResearchOrg enabled him to balance his paid employment with leisure activities better than in his previous job.

Several women described their situation as balanced, contrasting it to when their children were younger. For example, Becky stated:

“When they're younger you tend to focus on the family but as the children get older you can focus on yourself more and do the activities that you like.”

(Becky, 48, lived with adult child, admin, part-time)

The issue of having time to “focus on yourself” was raised by several women in mid-life as being something they now enjoyed that they had not previously. Hilda described this transition in more detail:

“It’s just recently since the children [have got older]. They had ballet classes, football, saxophone lessons, violin lessons, and it all fell at weekends so we’ve always had to work round them. Now that they’re more grown-up and don’t want to be with us so much it’s nice. We can just go walking and it’s quiet.”

(Hilda, 57, lived with husband and teenage child, technical, full-time)

Some female participants also described no longer feeling they ‘had’ to do domestic work to the same extent as when their children were younger.

“I don’t feel like I’ve got to be doing something else [at home] because it’s only us to worry about now. It’s never really any pressure at home, which helps.”

(Kirsty, 61, lived with husband, technical, full-time)

10.1.1.2. Balance: time

Some participants described their lives being balanced because of time related issues, including minimal commuting time, and not being expected to work more than their contracted hours of employment. For example, Becky spoke about enjoying walking to and from work, and Natasha described having a short commute between her work and care responsibilities at home:

“I wanted to stay close [to home] because the school is literally across the road, just five minutes away, so if I got called out I could be at the school in two minutes.”

(Natasha, 44, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, admin, full-time)

She later described how she was able to go home at lunchtime to do household chores so she would have less to do in the evening. Natasha’s account differs from Becky’s in that the latter described enjoying walking to work due to the “fresh air and exercise”, whereas Natasha wanted to work near to home for childcare reasons.

Others spoke about experiencing good balance because of their working hours. In some cases this was in comparison to previous experiences, as discussed above. Other participants described how their working hours enabled them to do other things in their

lives. For example, Elsa started work early in the morning which allowed her to have afternoons to herself, whilst Ken found he was able to balance paid employment with caring for his mother due to his set hours at ResearchOrg.

10.1.1.3. Balance: home related

A small number of participants reported being able to lead a balanced life because of others either sharing or taking on responsibility for household tasks. For example, Beth and Elaine, who both lived with their parents, spoke about their parents doing the majority of domestic work which allowed them to relax in the evenings. It is likely that other participants had assistance with domestic work which enabled them to achieve some form of good balance, but that may not have discussed it within the interview due to it being the status quo and therefore 'normalised' and not considered worth mentioning.

In other cases, participants made reference to their home situation as enabling them to have a well balanced life. For some women, this was articulated as a comparison between their current and previous situation, as discussed above. Others commented on how not having children allowed them to be more independent, and therefore more balanced:

“I like to be involved in other things. A job is important but I think it’s good to have a balance. I don’t suppose I could do it quite the same if I had a family but I’m on my own. I’m lucky that I can do it.”

(Grace, 49, lived alone, admin, full-time)

10.1.1.4. Balance: work related

The importance of paid employment in relation to independence and one’s own self worth, therefore leading to good balance, was raised by a small number of women. This theme was pertinent throughout their narratives, possibly due to having had their independence challenged; Beth through chronic illness, Janet by an abusive partner, Natasha through depression, and Tasmin through family issues. Whilst there were many aspects of imbalance evident in these womens’ lives, they described their work as being a source of good balance. For example, Tasmin spoke at length about the positive influence of paid employment on her life:

“I come in now and think, ‘I’ve been out working, I’m really exhausted but I can talk about things at work’ and I feel as if I actually belong, whereas before I felt quite isolated.”

(Tasmin, 43, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, cared for elderly mother who lives nearby, technical, full-time)

She later highlighted the positive overspill she had experienced from paid work:

“It was almost like I found myself again [when I went back to work]. In some ways I was stronger at being a parent as well.”

10.1.2. The juggling act: Imbalance

This section examines: commuting as a source of imbalance; problems with balancing domains; and the impact of imbalance on health. A further form of imbalance related to permeation of psychological borders; for example, thinking about work issues at home, or home issues at work. This issue will be explored in more detail within the psychological permeability section below.

10.1.2.1. Imbalance: commuting

Some participants spoke about commuting to and from work as being a source of imbalance. This contrasts with others who described the commute as being a space for ‘switching’ on and off between domains, or a time to unwind. Most spoke about the length of time spent commuting intruding on the family and leisure domains. In many cases it was the extra time taken to commute, and the stress and frustration associated with driving and congestion, which led to imbalance. For example, Cathy spoke about how the stress her commute added to the other sources of stress in her life:

“You sit in traffic for twenty-five minutes, then you come in [to work] and get the same old rubbish each time, you just think ‘why am I here?’”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

10.1.2.2. Imbalance: balancing domains

Most imbalance reported by participants related to problems balancing domains. The majority of participants spoke about this resulting in stress, tiredness, and limited time to socialise. However, the causes of imbalance differed across the sample, with some gender differences being evident. The majority who reported imbalance due to juggling paid employment with caring for children were women. For example, Denise described the

impact of spending her days in paid employment followed by her evenings doing domestic work (the ‘second shift’²⁶), and the inevitability she felt in her situation (“that’s life”):

“It’s got to the point where I don’t know what my body’s running on. I down the coffee at break times and lunch times and just keep going until home time, then I get home and I’m just like (sighs) ‘I’m home’. And then I start again. I don’t get a break and it’s horrible, it really is. But that’s life.”

(Denise, 29, lived with husband and pre-school child, technical, full-time)

Some participants spoke about conflict arising from combining paid work with caring for elderly relatives, and how this impacted on their ‘free’ time. In other cases it was combining paid work with studying or a second job which caused imbalance. Victor, who worked part-time elsewhere alongside his part-time work at ResearchOrg, spoke about the impact combining jobs had on his relationship with his wife:

“Sometimes we don’t see that much of each other. There are times when [my second sport-related job] can interfere with holidays. I don’t like to be away when the [sport] season’s on and it causes rows.”

(Victor, 54, lived with wife, manual, part-time, also worked part-time)

10.1.2.3. Imbalance: impact on health

Various health issues were raised in relation to imbalance. Tiredness was spoken about by a number of women, in particular affecting the family and leisure domains. For example, Denise said:

“It’s a case of work Monday to Friday, and on Friday evening you don’t want to do anything. Then it gets to the weekend and we’re both so tired we don’t want to do anything.”

(Denise, 29, lived with husband and pre-school child, technical, full-time)

However, in many cases, whilst tiredness was acknowledged as an annoyance or inconvenience, it was also viewed as ‘normal’ and inevitable:

²⁶ The ‘second shift’ is defined as the (unpaid) work people (primarily women) do in the family domain, such as housework and caring, following the ‘first shift’ of paid employment (Hochschild & Machung, 1989).

“I do get quite tired when I get home. All I want to do is have dinner and then do nothing. That is a bit of a pain. I would like a few more hours in the day, but doesn't everyone?”

(Elaine, 21, lived with parents, technical, full-time)

In contrast, the main way in which male participants spoke about the relationship between imbalance and health was in relation to diet and exercise. Two participants who worked shifts spoke specifically about this issue. In this example it appeared to be Fred's working hours which particularly disrupted his eating patterns and physical activity, leading to imbalance:

“Sometimes living on my own it's all microwave meals and kebabs and not enough vegetables. I try but it never works out, especially with my hours. [...] I don't eat properly, I don't exercise properly, I'm not very healthy. In fact, the only thing that keeps me in OK shape is probably my age. If I was older I'm sure I'd be getting very fat and I'd probably be having a lot more problems.”

(Fred, 26, lived alone, family abroad, manual, full-time, also studied part-time)

10.1.3. Did not talk about balance or imbalance

Whilst around half of participants spoke specifically about overall or occurrences of good balance in their lives, the remainder did not speak about balance in their lives at all. This may have been for a number of reasons. Some may not have felt they experienced any balance in their lives. For example, Cathy spoke very negatively about most aspects of her life, including her paid work, the home domain, and her (lack of) social life. Others may not have felt it relevant to talk about balance in their lives, instead talking about instances of imbalance which stood out as abnormal. It is also possible they felt that the interview was focused on problems in achieving balance.

As for good balance, there were also some participants who did not report any imbalance in their lives. These people predominantly did not have caring responsibilities for children or relatives. Only one participant who did not report imbalance had offspring living at home. Hilda had two children, one teenager living at home and one who lived away. During the interview she reflected on how her life was more balanced now her children were older, as was highlighted in the earlier section relating to balance.

10.2. Flexibility and permeability

Flexibility is a dominant issue within the work-life balance literature. Flexible working policies have formed a key part of work-life balance policy at both a national and an organisational level (Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, accessed July 2008; James, in press; Taylor, 2001; Wise, 2003). A fifth of full-time and a quarter of part-time employees made use of some form of flexible working arrangement in 2003 (Summerfield & Babb, 2004), with the most commonly exploited policy being flexible working hours²⁷. Although it is important that an examination of work-life balance looks beyond flexible working policies (Hyman et al., 2001), whilst work-life balance discourse and policy continue to focus on flexibility, this remains a key area.

Flexibility at work can be an important method of maintaining borders between different life domains. By enjoying some form of flexibility and control over working practices, borders can be managed in order to minimise disruption between domains (Fleetwood, 2007). However, flexible working can also allow borders to become permeable by allowing personal issues to impact on working practices to a greater degree, and the reverse. Furthermore, different forms of flexibility can impact on work-life balance in different ways, not always positively (Russell, O'Connell, & McGinnity, 2009).

Who has control over flexibility is an important factor to consider. Whilst flexible working practices are generally framed as positive for work-life balance, when these policies are implemented to meet the demands of the employer over that of the worker it can result in loss of control over working hours and practices (Fleetwood, 2007; Hyman, Scholarios, & Baldry, 2005a).

Whilst flexibility is often related to control over hours worked, it can take different forms depending on the nature of the borders involved. Referring back to Clark's (2000) work/family border theory, there are three main forms of border: physical (where domain-relevant behaviour can take place), temporal (when tasks can be done), and psychological (the thinking patterns, behaviours and emotions that are suitable to each domain). These borders are made flexible and permeable in different ways. For example, temporal borders can be made flexible by employees having high levels of control over the hours they work,

²⁷ Flexible working hours are defined as policies designed to give employees greater flexibility or control over scheduling whilst not decreasing the number of hours worked each week (James, in press).

and physical borders by employees having control over where they work. Psychological borders can be made permeable by employees thinking about and experiencing emotions related to work at home, and having thoughts and emotions related to home at work.

For the ResearchOrg sample, the physical borders between paid employment and other domains were strong, with there being little scope for working outside the workplace due to the nature of the work involved. For example, it was not possible to work as a cleaner, a security guard, or a receptionist from home. However, flexibility and permeability was found in participants' temporal and psychological borders. This section examines reported experiences of flexibility and permeability amongst the sample, in particular focusing on flexibility and control over working hours (temporal flexibility), and permeability of psychological borders.

10.2.1. Temporal flexibility: flexibility and control over working hours

Participants reported varying levels of temporal flexibility, mainly in relation to flexibility and control over working hours. However, the level of control participants had over working hours did not always correspond with usage of flexible working policies. Where flexibility of working hours did exist, it fell into three broad areas: 'flexitime' (core hours of work with a flexible beginning or end of their working day), floating time-off for part-time employees (participants were able to change the days and sometimes the hours they worked according to both their and their managers' needs on a week-by-week basis), and informal arrangements (most commonly an agreement with a colleague or supervisor to start work early so they could leave early, take time off and 'make up the hours' at a later point, or swap shifts with colleagues). Temporal flexibility – or lack of it - was also raised in relation to other domains. For example, Alice reported having to pay a fine if she was late to collect her children from their after-school club, indicating strong temporal borders.

In order to gain a better understanding of reported temporal flexibility, participants were divided into three broad groups: those who experienced high levels of temporal flexibility; those who experienced some flexibility; and those that experienced little or no flexibility.

10.2.1.1. High levels of temporal flexibility

The majority of participants who experienced high levels of temporal flexibility did so through informal arrangements. They were mainly women working in administrative jobs with no caring responsibilities. Furthermore, the majority of the part-time employees in the sample (five of the total seven) reported high levels of temporal flexibility, indicating that,

for some, part-time hours were a form of flexibility. None of the manual employees reported high levels of temporal flexibility, whereas the technical workers who did so spoke about accessing informal arrangements, as opposed to the diversity of arrangements the administrative workers had access to.

Informal arrangements, described as “give and take” by Janet, appeared to exist through understandings between colleagues and supervisors. Alice described how her positive relationship with her supervisor was important in having access to temporal flexibility:

“My boss is really good and really flexible. If I have to go into the school for some reason in the morning she’s quite happy for me to make the time up later, or on the odd occasion where the children haven’t been well she’s said I can take the extra hours and either make it up or take it in lieu of extra hours I’ve already done.”

(Alice, 45, lived with 2 primary school aged children, admin, part-time)

The mutual understanding highlighted in Alice’s narrative was echoed in other descriptions of informal temporal flexibility arrangements, in particular the concept of “not taking advantage” (Elaine) and not abusing the positive relationship that had developed. For example, Becky stated:

“They know that you're not off every week and they're quite happy. You make up the time, they're fine that way.”

(Becky, 48, lived with adult child, admin, part-time)

Some participants described feeling guilty when they had to make use of these arrangements, even when it was unavoidable or a contractual obligation (for example, Debbie described her manager as being “good” in understanding the need to schedule her floating day-off around her university commitments, yet expressed guilt that colleagues often had their working hours scheduled around her needs). These attitudes towards temporal flexibility appear to be embedded within the construct of being a ‘good’ worker and colleague.

Andy was the only man in the sample who described having high levels of temporal flexibility. He did this in the context of having high levels of control over his work, describing himself as ‘telling’, as opposed to asking, his supervisor for time off. However, when he spoke about temporal flexibility he did so hypothetically, not raising the need to be flexible with his working hours in the same way as some other participants.

“I would tell [my supervisor] and he would just say... well, he would say whatever he says. The obvious thing would be make the time up, that’s the same as if you come in late.”

(Andy, 48, lived with mother, cared for mother, technical, full-time)

The majority of participants who reported high levels of temporal flexibility did not have caring responsibilities. It may be that they did not need to make as much use of flexible working practices, and therefore perceived themselves to have access to high levels of temporal flexibility. They may also have been able to be more flexible in the family domain as they did not have caring responsibilities, thus being viewed positively by managers and colleagues in the informal “give and take” relationship described above, and therefore on the few occasions they needed access to flexibility they were able to do so. They may also have been more able to start work earlier or work later in order to ‘make up the hours’, which informal flexibility relied on. This was reflected in Janet’s narrative. She talked about temporal flexibility at work in the context of being able to be flexible in the family domain:

“I’m lucky as I’m on my own. I haven’t got anybody at home to come home to or a family so I can be very flexible.”

(Janet, 62, lived alone, technical, full-time, also worked part-time)

Two participants with children described high levels of temporal flexibility at work. Alice worked part-time, finishing work at lunchtime, allowing her some flexibility to ‘make up the hours’ as she was able to work slightly later in the day if needed. Denise had recently started working for ResearchOrg, so spoke about her perception as opposed to her experience of temporal flexibility:

“I think it’s one of them situations where if you’ve got children they’re a bit more lenient.”

(Denise, 29, lived with husband and pre-school child, technical, full-time)

One participant stood out as she reported experiencing a higher degree of temporal flexibility and control over her working hours than other participants:

“Everyone can pretty much do what they like as long as you are working and making progress [...] I can arrive or leave when I want.”

(Elaine, 21, lived with parents, technical, full-time)

However, Elaine's working situation differed significantly from other participants as she was working for ResearchOrg on a student placement as a technical worker. Her working patterns and level of control over work had more in common with research staff than with the administrative, manual and technical workers described in this study.

10.2.1.2. Some temporal flexibility

The majority of participants who experienced some temporal flexibility did so through informal arrangements. They had a mix of job types (administrative, manual, and technical), and all worked full-time. They were mainly men, and many had children living at home with them.

Some participants highlighted that the nature of their work meant they were unable to be flexible, indicating strong temporal borders limiting when work must be done. For example, Hilda stated that she unable to work on a flexitime scheme as she had to "fit in" with work colleagues:

"We couldn't obviously do flexitime cos I've gotta fit in with [my colleagues]. But if there was an emergency you'd just ring up and say, 'look this has happened, I'm not coming in' and they'd be fine."

(Hilda, 57, lived with husband and teenage child, technical, full-time)

Amongst manual workers, temporal flexibility existed through swapping shifts:

"Basically you swap shifts. If I needed something then I would just say to so-and-so, 'look – I'll do that, can you do this?' And I would do the same for them. Everyone has different needs and wants and you just adjust the shifts to suit."

(Michael, 42, lived with wife and primary school aged child, family abroad, manual, full-time)

As Michael highlighted, there was a high level of awareness of colleagues' "needs and wants", alongside having some level of control over shift patterns.

In contrast to participants who reported high levels of temporal flexibility, there were a greater number of participants with children within the 'some level of temporal flexibility' category. Whilst most spoke about temporal flexibility in relation to informal arrangements at work, two described flexibility in the context of childcare responsibilities. Rob's partner was training to be a nurse and he therefore had greater responsibility for childcare than he had had previously. When his partner was on placement he was responsible for collecting

the children from school, which was incompatible with his working hours. However, he was able to do this with prior agreement with his supervisor. Fiona spoke about experiencing some level of temporal flexibility whereby she was able to ‘make up the hours’ if she occasionally needed to leave work early. However, she described a level of animosity from her supervisor when she requested flexibility due to childcare commitments:

“I’ve had two days off because the girls have been ill. My line manager, she’s childless and she doesn’t really understand which I get a little bit annoyed with. If you don’t want staff to be off with kids, don’t employ staff with children.”

(Fiona, 35, lived with 2 teenager children, admin, full-time)

The exception to these informal arrangements was Adam, who worked on a flexitime scheme. Interestingly, Adam felt he worked longer hours following the introduction of flexitime than when he had previously used informal arrangements. For example, in the past visits to the dentist were agreed informally, whereas under the new scheme they were monitored.

10.2.1.3. Little or no temporal flexibility

A minority of participants reported experiencing little or no flexibility in their working time. All worked full-time, and there was a mix of women and men, and job types. Only one person in this group, Cathy, had children living with her. These participants fell into three groups: those who accepted or did not question the situation; those who had some problem with the lack of flexibility; and those who found the situation problematic.

Stuart and Ingrid fell into the first category. Stuart spoke about having no flexibility with his working hours but did not discuss it as being a problem:

“[The hours are] hard and fast, no flexitime.”

(Stuart, 48, lived alone, manual, full-time)

Some participants spoke about the nature of the work restricting temporal flexibility. For example, Ingrid compared her technical work with other workplaces where there were more employees and therefore more scope for flexibility:

“ResearchOrg is good with flexibility but you can’t do it everywhere. You can do it in some places perhaps, because they have a lot of people there and they might not mind if you don’t [start work] at quarter to nine. But in here it’s quite crucial.”

(Ingrid, 52, lived with husband, family abroad, technical, full-time)

Yvonne was the only administrative worker to describe limited temporal flexibility. As she worked as a receptionist her work had to take place at a set place and at a set time; she had strong physical and temporal borders around her work domain. Yvonne's situation differed from the other administrators in the sample who were in clerical roles 'behind the scenes' and experienced weaker temporal borders.

"Sometimes I think it'd be nice if you could have a bit more flexi, you could come in earlier one day and perhaps go earlier. But it's not suitable; you can't do that on reception. There's only me on reception and the only cover I have is for my lunch, other than that I'm on my own."

(Yvonne, 26, lived with parents and brother, admin, full-time)

Whilst some participants found their lack of temporal flexibility "a slight constraint" (Peter, manual work), it was not problematised to any great extent. A possible explanation could be that they expected it due to the nature of their work. Another reason could be personal circumstances; Yvonne lived with her parents and did not have any caring responsibilities, and Ingrid acknowledged how her personal circumstances affected her attitude towards the temporal flexibility:

"It doesn't bother me at all because my life is quite stable."

(Ingrid, 52, lived with husband, family abroad, technical, full-time)

Furthermore, it is possible that participants in this category were able to have jobs with limited or no temporal flexibility as their home domain was more flexible due to lack of caring responsibilities.

The only participant to describe limited temporal flexibility at work as a problem was Cathy. She was also the only person in this group who had children under eighteen living with her. She contrasted the attitude in her current division to a previous workplace:

"That's another thing that gets me about being here. You've gotta be in on the dot, half-past eight, whereas in [my previous workplace], people might [come in at] one minute past seven or one minute to nine, it was ok as long as you were there and you did your hours before you went home."

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

She later described how she felt the nature of her work did not necessitate limited temporal flexibility, stating: “I don’t think the fish are that bothered [about when I start work]”, contrasting her experience with research staff who, she felt, enjoyed a high level of flexibility.

10.2.2. Psychological permeability

Whilst some forms of temporal flexibility can be positive for employees (Fleetwood, 2007; Russell et al., 2009), psychological permeability may have more negative connotations, with non-domain relevant emotions and thoughts intruding on other domains. As has been found in other studies of manual employees (for example see Speakman & Marchington, 2004), as participants were unable to physically take their work home with them in the same way some professionals and managers do, the main form of permeation between work and other domains was through psychological borders, for example thinking about work at home.

Participants were divided into three groups: those who reported little or no psychological permeation between domains (i.e. domain-relevant thinking patterns, behaviours and emotions did not permeate other domains); those who reported some; and those who reported high levels of permeation. Whilst participants who reported little or no psychological permeation were generally positive and those who reported high levels were generally negative, there was a mix of perceptions for those who reported some permeation; some viewed it as positive, some as negative yet inevitable, and others as unproblematic. Within each section two forms of psychological permeation are presented: ‘work-to-home’ (psychological permeation from paid employment to family), and ‘home-to-work’ (psychological permeation from family life to paid employment).

10.2.2.1. Little or no psychological permeability

These participants were able to forget about work issues at home and vice versa. This was often because they did not find paid employment stressful. Natasha described this being a consideration when applying for jobs:

“I was a nurse before and didn’t really fancy going back to nursing. I wanted something that would be less stressful so that I could do my job, go home and forget about it.”

(Natasha, 44, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, admin, full-time)

Others similarly spoke of the lack of stress at work. For example, Neil stated:

“It’s the sort of job where at quarter to five you say ‘that’s it’. You can leave and not worry about it. I’ve never had any problems worrying about work outside of work; it’s not a stressful job.”

(Neil, 40, lived with mother and brother, cared for mother, manual, full-time)

Only a few participants explicitly spoke about there being little or no psychological permeation between home and work. Rob was one participant who spoke about maintaining strong, non-permeable boundaries between domains:

“When I’m finished here I try to leave it at the gate. I go home with none of that trouble and conflict. When I’m coming to work in the morning [...] as soon as I get in the car I start thinking of what I’ll be doing at work today, leaving home there for the next eight hours. That’s how I try to live.”

(Rob, 41, lived with wife and 2 teenage children, family abroad, technical, full-time)

10.2.2.2. Some psychological permeability

Some psychological permeation between work and home meant occasionally thinking about paid employment outside of the work domain, but it being either a rare occurrence and/or not a cause for concern. For example, when asked if she was able to forget about work at the end of the day, Fiona indicated that she felt it was “human nature” to have some psychological permeation between domains if a problem occurred:

“It depends on the situation. If everything’s going smoothly then you just switch off. If you’ve got something that’s bothering you then obviously you can’t. If something happens and it winds me up then it does bug me, I can’t just switch off and relax, it’s not human nature.”

(Fiona, 35, lived with 2 teenager children, admin, full-time)

Andy also reported some level of psychological permeation, but questioned whether this was negative. He reported being “kinda happy” with thinking about work issues outside of work:

“At the weekends I never think about work. During the week, yes, sometimes, but never in a bad way. Like I was on my own once and really snowed under and I was

thinking ‘how do I approach this?’ But it was never a big deal. There are a lot of times I’ve thought about work but in a good way. I might think ‘I’ll do this tomorrow’. But I’m kinda happy that I’m thinking of doing what I’m doing. Maybe sounds a bit tragic but that’s what it is.”

(Andy, 48, lived with mother, cared for mother, technical, full-time)

Most participants who reported some level of psychological permeation between work and home described individual incidents such as disagreements with colleagues affecting them, but one participant reported a different aspect. Thomas spoke about developing an attachment to the animals he worked with, and how this sometimes affected him emotionally outside of work:

“You get attached [to the animals] and you find there are times when so many are falling sick you get affected. At times when you go home you are wondering how these animals are, how we will find them tomorrow. Somehow you develop some attachment to them. Definitely at times you think of what is happening at work and what will happen. [...] That is where stress can develop, if you keep thinking instead of relaxing your mind is still on the work.”

(Thomas, 47, lived with brother and cousin, family abroad, technical, full-time)

The majority of participants who described some psychological permeation between work and home did not have caring responsibilities. This may be because people with caring responsibilities had so many things happening in the family domain that these demands cancelled out any incidents in the work domain which may permeate psychologically. Hilda spoke about there being “so much going on at home” that thoughts about work did not affect her there:

“Sometimes you get a little bickering, little upsets. But I can just go home and cook dinner. [...] Normally I just brush it aside cos there’s so much going on at home.”

(Hilda, 57, lived with husband and teenage child, technical, full-time)

Only female participants spoke about psychological permeation in the opposite direction (from home to work), and most spoke about this positively. For example, Elsa described how, whilst her mother’s illness did affect her at work, it was balanced by support from her colleagues:

“Because [my colleague’s] dad’s in hospital we relate very well to each other. She knows what I’m coping with and I know what she’s coping with. In fact we have a laugh because their antics, it’s nice to have her because we both understand the situation. So it’s not a problem, no.”

(Elsa, 61, lived with husband, technical, part-time)

10.2.2.3. High levels of psychological permeability

The majority of participants who reported having high levels of psychological work-to-home permeation were women in administrative work. Of those who reported home-to-work permeation, the majority were women with caring responsibilities.

Many of the examples given of high work-to-home psychological permeation were isolated incidents, for example being unusually busy at work or having a disagreement with a colleague. Cathy spoke about experiencing such high levels of psychological permeation between work and home she found it hard to “let the subject go”:

“If I’ve had a particular ruck with the one person it makes my life hell and it rattles round in my head. Depending on what’s been said or done, I find it hard to let go sometimes. Some people might say that’s my problem, I should just let it go. But sometimes I find it really hard to let the subject go.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

Later she described how this psychological permeation had impacted on her marriage:

“We’re discussing [quitting my job] at the moment because it did nearly breakup our marriage, all this to-ing and fro-ing and not being happy at work.”

Rachel reported high levels of work-to-home psychological permeation when her colleague was away from work:

“When I’m working on my own there’s twice as much work to do. I find myself going home and laying in bed worrying about how much I’ve got to do the next day. [...] It upsets me because I get to the point where I think I shouldn’t be worrying about work when I’m out of work, but you can’t switch off sometimes. I suppose I should learn to for me own health, cos it’s not good for you being stressed out and worried.”

(Rachel, 30, lived alone, manual, full-time)

Only one man spoke about experiencing high work-to-home psychological permeation. Bill described not getting on with a particular colleague, and how this affected him at home:

“I’ll go home chuntering, but then I realise I can’t take work home and I just have to accept it. I come in and start afresh as it were. [...] I don’t get on particularly well with one of the people I work with [...] there are things that make me very, very annoyed [...] I’m a person that can’t bottle things up so as my youngest son’s at home I’ll sometimes unload it on him which I really shouldn’t.”

(Bill, 60, lived with teenage child, manual, full-time)

The majority of participants who reported high levels of home-to-work psychological permeation were parents or carers. Home issues permeated the work sphere in different ways. For example Cathy, Natasha and Tasmin all described feeling guilty that they were unable to be at home with their children when they were at work. Natasha spoke about the conflict she felt over not being at home with her children yet feeling it was her “turn” to spend time doing things for herself, such as working and attending an orchestra: Denise described an occasion where the psychological boundaries between home and work disintegrated to the degree that she “totally broke down”:

“One day I just felt so low, so tired, very down, and I ended up hiding in the toilets for a good fifteen minutes and totally broke down. But once I’d done that I sorted myself out, I was fine again. [...] I think at work it’s a lot more difficult to pick yourself back up, but you have no choice – you just get it all out your system, give yourself a slap across the face and then grin and bear it. You just plod through the day and think ‘it’s nearly home time’.”

(Denise, 29, lived with husband and pre-school child, technical, full-time)

Only two men, Neil and Colin, reported experiencing high home-to-work psychological permeation. Both lived with elderly parents, and during their interviews highlighted how this relationship impacted on them at work. For example, Neil described how his father’s death and caring for his newly widowed mother had affected him.

10.3. Strategies for work-life balance

This section presents an overview of strategies participants reported for maintaining, and in some cases, attempting to achieve, a good work-life balance. It is debatable whether the

strategies discussed in this section were developed by participants as part of a long-term strategic choice, or if they were simply ad-hoc responses employed in order to ‘get by’. Indeed, a distinction could be made between ‘coping devices’, which enable individuals to survive in the immediate-term, and ‘strategies’ which are actively employed as part of a long-term goal (Anderson, Becchofer, & Kendrick, 1994). Furthermore, strategies for coping with stress are often classified by the function they perform, either in the form of ‘problem focused’ (attempting to deal with the problems or demands as they occur) or ‘emotion focused’ strategies (attempting to deal with emotional disturbance that may occur from demands) (Cooper et al., 2001). However, the realities of work and life make the distinction between long-term choices (‘strategies’) and short-term adaptations (‘coping devices’) difficult to maintain (Hyman, Scholarios, & Baldry, 2005b). Similarly, the distinction between ‘problem’ and ‘emotion’ focused strategies are not always clear as similar behaviours often serve different functions, and individuals may use both forms (Cohen, 1987). Therefore for the purposes of this analysis the term ‘strategy’ is used, whilst acknowledging the complexity behind the concept.

Participants described two main types of strategy: practical strategies (specific actions adopted to maintain balance through managing practical aspects of life), and stress-reduction strategies (those focused on reducing the impact of stress, either by minimising stress which occurred because of imbalance, or minimising stress which may itself be the cause of imbalance).

The majority of participants who described employing some form of strategy to maintain or achieve good work-life balance had caring responsibilities, studied alongside their paid employment at ResearchOrg, or had some form of ongoing health issue. Of the remainder, some had adult children so had possibly experienced imbalance in the past and developed strategies accordingly, and others had external responsibilities such as providing for children who did not live with them. Many of these participants had had to develop strategies due to the complexities in their lives.

10.3.1. Strategies for work-life balance: practical strategies

Some participants reported developing specific, ‘practical’ strategies in order to maintain or achieve work-life balance. These included working close to home in order to minimise commuting time, and changing employment as previous jobs had not offered enough temporal flexibility to facilitate work-life balance.

Some participants had changed work to fulfil childcare responsibilities. Often this involved applying for jobs which allowed them to work part-time, and they described looking for a job that “fitted in” (Kirsty, technical work) or “anything that I could juggle round my daughter” (Cathy, technical work). Some participants spoke about continuing to work full-time but changing their employment in order to fit around caring for children, for example Natasha had previously started a child-care business from home.

Whilst the majority who spoke about changing their job and/or their working hours to care for children were women, two men also spoke about this. Michael and Bill stood out from the other working fathers because of their personal situations. Michael described how, in his home country, the extended family would help to care for young children, but as he had moved abroad this could not happen. He therefore applied for a job which allowed him to assist with caring for his son:

“With my previous work I was out from about half six in the morning, so I was never there to help get him ready for school or take him to crèche, and I was never there in the evening because I was always coming home from work when she was having to collect and feed him. So I took a small job, just to get him over that.”

(Michael, 42, lived with wife and primary school aged child, family abroad, manual, full-time)

Bill, a widower, had previously worked in a job that required him to work shifts, so had applied for a job at ResearchOrg where he could work fixed hours:

“My youngest son really needed my full-time attention. I couldn’t cope with the shift work [in my previous job] and the changing shifts. They wouldn’t give me any help whatsoever as far as part-time work or putting me on days. So I applied for my present job which has more regular hours so I can spend more time with my son.”

(Bill, 60, lived with teenage child, manual, full-time)

A small number of women with caring responsibilities also spoke about undertaking specific tasks which enabled them to manage their time more effectively to minimise potential imbalance. For example, Natasha spoke about applying for jobs close to her children’s school so she could collect them if unwell or in an emergency. Elsa described getting up early to do household chores before her family woke. Denise, one of the few participants with a child under the age of five, spoke about alternating childcare at

weekends with her husband so that one of them would wake up early to look after their child whilst the other slept. All of these women had caring responsibilities which could potentially cause increased conflict in their lives, and had developed practical strategies in order to incorporate these demands into their lives whilst minimising potential conflict.

10.3.2. Strategies for work-life balance: stress-reduction strategies

Participants reported several types of ‘stress-reduction’ strategies. These took different forms: ‘compartmentalising’ different aspects of life (by creating and maintaining strong psychological borders); distracting themselves (for example, by watching television or listening to music); diffusing tension (for example, talking about problems or exercising); and ignoring stress.

10.3.2.1. Stress-reduction strategies: compartmentalising

Some participants described ‘compartmentalisation’ strategies, whereby they attempted to draw firm psychological borders between domains. These took the form of stopping thinking about work when at home, or creating a ‘buffering’ zone where they described psychologically moving (and, in the case of commuting, physically moving) between domains in different ways. Some men spoke about ‘switching-off’ and forgetting about work outside of work. For example, Andy stated:

“When I leave here at half 3 today I won’t even think about it again until Monday morning. All I’ll be thinking about is poker, football and drinking, nothing else.”

(Andy, 48, lived with mother, cared for mother, technical, full-time)

However, one man acknowledged that compartmentalising was not a sustainable long-term strategy:

“[I’m] quite good at forgetting about things. It’s not a great philosophy, cos if you put it in your head it’s no’ going away, you’ll have to deal with it eventually.”

(Stuart, 48, lived alone, manual, full-time)

In contrast, some women who spoke about compartmentalisation presented it as a process which they needed to work on to achieve. This was done either through ‘switching-off’ from work, or by using a ‘buffering’ or ‘liminal’ space to switch between domains. For example, Beth described the process of psychologically switching between domains:

“I try and talk myself out of thinking about work. The moment I feel myself thinking about it I try and stop and think ‘I’m not at work, I’m at home, I need to switch off’. I try and blank my mind, relax my muscles, make myself switch off.”

(Beth, 24, lived with parents, admin, part-time)

Hilda described using her journey to and from work as a space to switch between domains, as well as physically move between the two locations:

“In the mornings [cycling to work is] my wake-up time. I get up, make my husband a cup of tea, give me children their breakfast, then get on my bike and nice and slowly come to. Coming home, it’s ‘that’s me day’s work’ and off I go.”

(Hilda, 57, lived with husband and teenage child, technical, full-time)

10.3.2.2. Stress-reduction strategies: distracting

Some participants spoke about ‘distracting’ themselves from domain-based issues. This took the form of watching television, walking the dog, listening to music, and reading books. Thomas spoke about employing this strategy when he chose what to watch on television in the evenings:

“Once I reach home I try to relax and forget. The reason I prefer watching comedies is they make me laugh out loud. By the time I’m going to bed I try to laugh and be happy.”

(Thomas, 47, lived with brother and cousin, family abroad, technical, full-time)

For Cathy, spending time with her pets was a form of distracting herself from her problems at work and home:

“The animals aren’t stressed about anything. They just come and plonk themselves on you, give you a cuddle if you’re feeling a bit down in the dumps.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

10.3.2.3. Stress-reduction strategies: diffusing

The most common coping strategy reported by participants was ‘diffusing’ tension, for example by talking or through exercise. These strategies appeared to be gendered. Only women spoke about wanting or needing specific ‘me’ time in order to manage their work-life balance, whereas both women and men used exercise as a way to unwind.

Some participants, almost exclusively women, described talking about problems as a way of diffusing stress or imbalance. For example, Marion described talking to her sister about problems at work as a way of reducing tension. However, she also spoke about using a, possibly unintentional, compartmentalising strategy of being able to ‘switch off’ as her boyfriend was not interested in talking about her work issues:

“It’s quite good that I don’t talk about it when I get home cos I can really switch off. My sister’s quite a good support, cos she’s in a similar job, so she knows what you’re talking about. But yes, it’s good to switch off, because he’s not interested.”

(Marion, 33, lived with partner, cared for grandmother, admin, full-time)

The only male participant to report talking as a form of coping was Bill. He described talking about his problems with his son and to himself, using his time at home “like a release valve” until he felt able to “let go of it” and move into the home domain.

Several women spoke about the importance of ‘me’ time. This was time they tried to set aside for themselves. Often this was described specifically in the context of relaxing in order to cope with stressful situations. Many who spoke about ‘me’ time described it as positive, whilst recognising the conflicting demands on their lives. Natasha, one of the only participants with caring responsibilities who was regularly able to achieve ‘me’ time, spoke about this imbalance in more detail, describing feeling guilty for attending an orchestra and exercise classes. For the other women, ‘me’ time was more an ideal they hoped to achieve but rarely did. For example, Cathy described a recent incident where she had tried to have time alone which had caused problems with her husband:

“But they don’t seem to understand that you need that time out. [My husband] got all annoyed with me. I can’t win [...] he just doesn’t get it. He can go off and play golf cos he works shifts [...] but I don’t get that opportunity.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

Some participants spoke about using exercise to diffuse imbalance. Hilda described the importance of exercise to her:

“If I don’t have my exercise I’d go crackers [...] any sort of exercise, even just a nice long, gentle walk.”

(Hilda, 57, lived with husband and teenage child, technical, full-time)

Peter also described this:

“I do a bit of running at the weekends and some evenings. I find that quite physically demanding but mentally quite relaxing.”

(Peter, 59, lived with wife and adult child, manual, full-time)

10.3.2.4. Stress-reduction strategies: ignoring

A small number of participants spoke about actively ignoring issues as a method of coping. This took the form of ‘keeping busy’ and ‘keeping normal’. Both Laura and Ian spoke about this at times of high stress, when their parents died:

“When my father died I was working here. I came in the day he died and I remember somebody said to me ‘you don’t have to be here’. But that’s my way of coping. I even played squash that day. I thought, ‘I don’t know if I can do this’ but once I went out there and started to play I forgot and it was brilliant. It was the best thing to make me forget. Keep busy, that’s my motto to cope.”

(Laura, 70, lived with husband, cared for elderly aunt, admin, part-time, also worked part-time)

“When me mother died I got compassionate leave to go to the funeral. But I didn’t choose to take any longer. [...] I wanted to get back to normal as soon as possible because that’s my way of personally handling it.”

(Ian, 63, lived with wife, manual, full-time, also worked part-time)

10.4. Chapter summary

This chapter examined reported experiences of work-life balance, focusing on the areas of balance and imbalance, flexibility, permeability, and strategies for achieving and maintaining balance.

Some participants spoke about incidents of balance in their lives, particularly in relation to previous situations, availability of time, and in relation to work and home issues. Some gender differences were evident in these narratives; men were more likely to compare their work at ResearchOrg to previous employment, whereas women were more likely to compare their current situation with when their children were younger. Some participants spoke positively about time issues in terms of having a short commute, and working hours which did not intrude on other domains. The participants who spoke about paid employment being a source or cause of balance did so in the context of work not causing

undue stress. For a minority of women who had experienced imbalance due to family and/or health issues, work was described as a source of balance due to the independence and self confidence it provided.

Participants reported occurrences of imbalance in several ways: in relation to commuting, problems balancing domains, and impact on health. Whilst many participants reported similar outcomes from imbalance, such as stress, tiredness, and not having time to themselves, the sources of this conflict differed. The majority of participants who spoke about problems balancing caring responsibilities with paid employment were women. Imbalance impacted on health in different ways. Many women spoke about experiencing tiredness as a result of conflict, whilst also indicating a level of inevitability regarding their situation. Men were more likely to describe the impact imbalance had on their diet and physical activity.

Because of the nature of participants' jobs, work tended to be geographically rooted in the workplace, resulting in strong physical borders between work and other domains. Therefore the main ways in which participants experienced flexibility and permeability were temporally (control over time) and psychologically (thinking about and experiencing emotions related to work at home, and having thoughts and emotions related to home at work). There were gender, family, and work related differences in these narratives. For example, participants who described high levels of temporal flexibility were more likely to be women, less likely to have caring responsibilities and more likely to work part-time. The majority of the participants who described high levels of psychological permeation from work to home were women, and the majority who described high levels of psychological permeation from home to work were parents or carers.

Participants described two types of strategy to maintain or achieve work-life balance: practical (specific actions adopted to maintain balance through managing practical aspects of life) and stress-reduction strategies (focused on reducing the impact of stress). The majority of participants who employed one of these strategies had caring responsibilities, studied alongside their paid employment with ResearchOrg, or had some form of ongoing health issue; they had had to develop strategies in order to manage the complexities in their lives.

Practical strategies included working close to home in order to minimise commuting time, and changing jobs to increase temporal flexibility, and so facilitate work-life balance.

Stress-reduction strategies were categorised as compartmentalising (by creating and maintaining strong psychological borders), distracting (for example, by watching television or listening to music), diffusing (for example, talking about their issues or exercising), and ignoring. Women and men described compartmentalising their lives in different ways; men in terms of maintaining firm boundaries, and women as something that they needed to work at achieving. Diffusing was the most common type of coping strategy participants reported; women were more likely to talk about needing specific ‘me’ time, whereas exercise was spoken about by both men and women as a way of unwinding.

The final chapter will explore how work-life balance or imbalance and the varying components of this relates to Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory, the wider literature, and implications for policy.

11. Chapter 11: Discussion and conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how women and men in ‘non-professional’ jobs within one organisation perceived and managed the balance between their paid employment and their life outside work, how this impacted on their health, and what role (if any) gender played in this relationship. In order to address this broad aim, three research questions were identified:

1. How did women and men in ‘non-professional’ occupations talk about their lived experiences of work-life balance?
2. How did women and men in ‘non-professional’ occupations refer to health in relation to their work-life balance?
3. Was there a gendered nature to participants’ reports of work-life balance?

This thesis is unusual in that it used qualitative methods to explore gender, work-life balance and health amongst both women and men working in ‘non-professional’ occupations. It therefore generated original data and thought in this area, and furthers our understanding of work-life balance amongst ‘non-professional’ employees in low-strain²⁸ jobs.

This final chapter describes how the study has addressed the aim and research questions, as well as comparing the findings with previous research within the field. It refers back to Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory, considering what insights these findings add to the model. It then reviews the limitations and strengths of the study, considers ideas for further research, and implications for policy.

11.1. Review of the research questions

This study examined work-life balance through the lens of Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory. It did so by first examining each domain separately (‘paid employment’, ‘family’, and a third domain of ‘leisure’), then exploring several key areas of work-life balance. This section presents an overview of the findings of each chapter in relation to the research questions, before discussing work-life balance.

²⁸ As defined by Karesek and colleagues (1981); see chapter 6.

11.1.1. How did women and men in ‘non-professional’ occupations talk about their lived experiences of work-life balance?

Chapter 7 was framed by Karasek’s (1981) influential job strain model, and therefore focused on three key areas: job related demands, levels of control, and social support at work. All three areas were found to be highly subjective. Participants generally reported low levels of job strain and, as was highlighted by both the quantitative and qualitative data, high levels of job satisfaction. Incidents of job strain reported appeared to be isolated incidents as opposed to ongoing concerns. There were low levels of physical flexibility, temporal flexibility, and psychological permeability surrounding the work domain, indicating strong borders between paid work and other domains.

Chapter 8 presented data regarding the family domain, focusing on caring responsibilities and domestic work. The chapter highlighted the diversity of domestic situations in the sample. Perhaps unsurprisingly, participants with caring responsibilities for children or an adult relative spoke more about their family life than those without. Temporal and psychological borders surrounding family were weak, with family responsibilities and emotions often permeating other domains, indicating the importance of family (particularly caring responsibilities) in participants’ lives.

Chapter 9 examined participants’ reported experiences of leisure. Participants fell into three broad categories: those who prioritised leisure, those who experienced restrictions to leisure, and those who spoke of ‘routine’ leisure. For the majority of participants, borders surrounding leisure were weak, with other domains often limiting leisure, making this the most commonly compromised domain.

Chapter 10 explored reported experiences of work-life balance, focusing on the areas of balance, imbalance, flexibility, permeability, and strategies for achieving and maintaining balance. Participants generally reported good balance in their lives, with imbalance being limited to isolated incidents. Borders varied in terms of flexibility and permeability, as was highlighted by the previous three findings chapters. This had implications for the direction of balance and imbalance, with incidents of work-to-family imbalance being minimal (i.e. in the majority of cases, paid work did not create imbalance in the family domain), but work-to-leisure and family-to-leisure imbalance was more common (i.e. both paid work and family often conflicted with the leisure domain, limiting leisure).

11.1.2. How did women and men in 'non-professional' occupations refer to health in relation to their work-life balance?

Paid employment was related to health in a variety of ways. For example, participants associated physical job demands with improved health, or reporting the negative impact of physical strain or inactivity. Mental job demands, such as work-related stress or worry, were low. However, some isolated incidents impacted on participants outside of work, for example disagreements with colleagues. Some participants related social contact and social support positively to their mental health, particularly older women in the sample. However, a small number of participants spoke about social contact having a negative impact.

Some participants spoke about their home and family life in relation to health, in particular the small proportion of the sample who reported caring for an elderly adult relative. These participants described their caring responsibilities affecting them in other spheres of their lives, particularly in relation to health. Examples of this include being unable to sleep, feeling 'shattered', and not being able to concentrate at work.

For some participants, leisure was prioritised due to its relaxing nature, and used as an anti-stress strategy. Some participants reported tiredness being a limiting factor on leisure time, either as a result of work, or due to combining work with family commitments.

Work-life balance was related to health in a variety of ways. The participants who spoke about paid employment being a source or cause of good balance did so in the context of work not causing undue stress. Imbalance was found to lead to stress, tiredness, and not having time to themselves. Imbalance impacted on health in different ways. As with previous research (Cunningham-Burley et al., 2006; Nelson, 1997; Popay, 1992), many women spoke about experiencing tiredness as a result of conflict, whilst also indicating a level of inevitability regarding their situation. Men were more likely to describe the impact imbalance had on their diet and physical activity.

11.1.3. Was there a gendered nature to participants' reports of work-life balance?

There were a number of gender differences relating to the work domain. There were gender differences in how participants reported different forms of job-related demands, with women tending to describe time-related demands, whereas older men were more likely to describe the positive aspects of physical job demands in the context of their wider

health. How participants spoke about different forms of control was gendered, with men being more likely to talk about control over working practices, whereas women were more likely to raise the issue of control over working hours. Women's greater likelihood of discussing working hours may have been linked, in part, to caring responsibilities; women with caring responsibilities needed higher levels of temporal flexibility (flexible working hours) due to their roles as primary carers within the family domain. Women were more likely to speak positively about social contact and support at work, often linking social support to maintaining mental health.

There were a number of gender differences in findings about the family domain. Women tended to have the majority responsibility for caring and domestic work. There were both similarities and differences in how women and men in the sample spoke about their parenting roles. Both sexes described practical aspects of caring, such as collecting children from school and providing financially for them. However, women spoke about wider identity issues regarding parenthood, indicating the borders around this domain differ for mothers and fathers.

Of the participants who described leisure being a priority, a small number did so in relation to independence, all of who were female. A degree of 'work-family-leisure' conflict was reported by women with caring responsibilities, whereby participants had limited their leisure time due to the conflict and as a result, stress, which had arisen from trying to prioritise leisure within their lives.

There were a number of gender differences in the findings regarding work-life balance. For example, in relation to good balance, men were more likely to compare their work at ResearchOrg to previous employment, whereas women were more likely to compare to when their children were younger. The majority of participants who spoke about problems balancing caring responsibilities with paid employment were women. The majority of participants who described employing some form of strategy to maintain or achieve work-life balance had caring responsibilities, studied alongside their paid employment, or had some form of ongoing health issue.

11.2. Main conclusions

The main conclusion drawn from this study is that there are a number of distinguishing features between this sample of low-strain, 'non-professional' employees, and samples of professionals.

Firstly, the borders between participants' domains (paid work, family, and leisure) took different forms to professional occupations. Much of the literature about work-life balance in professional occupations problematises paid work as being the main source of imbalance (Eby et al., 2005; Guest, 2002), with paid employment being the largest and most important domain within individuals' lives (Swanson et al., 1998). However, within this sample experiences were more varied due to borders often being stronger between paid work and other domains (i.e. strong work-to-family and work-to-leisure borders). For example, due to the nature of the work being carried out, work was physically located in the workplace, meaning participants could not work from home in the way that some occupations can (e.g. through technology, or more 'knowledge-based' occupations (Hyman et al., 2003)). However, like the findings of a study of call centre and software firm employees (Hyman et al., 2003), participants were able to 'take work home' in other ways, for example through thinking about work in other domains (psychological permeation), tiredness, and in some cases stress from the work and family domains impacting on leisure. Furthermore, participants described minimal psychological permeation from paid employment to other domains, which contrasts with studies of professional occupations which have shown high levels of psychological permeation into the family and leisure domains (e.g. doctors (Swanson et al., 1998), senior female managers (Linehan & Walsh, 2000), and university professors (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999)). Temporal borders surrounding work were firmer due to the 'task-orientated' nature of the work (i.e. particular tasks needed to be completed at set times), as opposed to some professional occupations which have less clear set hours (for example, the 'long hours culture' within the legal profession (Bacik & Drew, 2006), and information and communication technology (ICT) workers (Laegran, 2008)).

Due to the relatively low-paid nature of the work carried out amongst the sample, in many cases the necessity of work to provide for self and family dominated over considerations of work-life balance. This is evident in other studies of low-income samples (Backett-Milburn et al., 2008; Dean, 2007; Weigt & Solomon, 2008). For example, a study of immigrant Latino poultry workers living in the United States (Grzywacz et al., 2007) found infrequent levels of work-family conflict, with paid employment seen as a "necessary and vital component" (p.1127) of family well-being.

Like other studies, combining paid employment with family life was found to limit time available for leisure (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004; Stebbins,

1992), and women and men experienced leisure time differently due to gender norms (Laegran, 2008; Larson et al., 1997; Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004). Because of this, leisure was found to be the most commonly compromised domain. This contrasts with other samples where, although leisure was often threatened due to imbalance, it was protected due to greater access to resources (Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Laegran, 2008).

Participants had more choice and agency than might be assumed for people in relatively low income, 'non-professional' jobs. As opposed to being 'locked into' their professions (Dean, 2007), some participants described actively choosing their job at ResearchOrg as it allowed them to maintain firm boundaries between paid employment and other domains, because it minimised the levels of stress and worry from paid employment due to psychological permeation, or it allowed them to fulfil obligations within the family domain (Hakim, 2002). There are questions regarding the level of agency behind these decisions due to economic, structural and gendered factors (Baker, 2008; Bird & Rieker, 2008; McDonald, Bradley, & Guthrie, 2006). For example, some manual workers had previously been employed in the armed forces and were therefore limited in their employment options. Furthermore, gender norms relating to caring responsibilities and domestic work may have constrained 'choice' for some women. In the majority of these cases, participants assumed responsibility for these 'choices' (Baker, 2008; Webber & Williams, 2008), presenting these decisions as a facilitator of good balance in their lives.

Like many other qualitative studies, this study found that imbalance was exacerbated by gender norms and expectations (Bacik & Drew, 2006; Connell, 2005; Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Halford, 2006; Hatten et al., 2002; Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Linehan & Walsh, 2000; Loscocco, 1997; Speakman & Marchington, 1999; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). Caring responsibilities were found to exacerbate gender differences in participants' experiences of work-life balance (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Linehan & Walsh, 2000; Stockley & Daly, 1999). The family is a primary site where gender norms are reproduced (Loscocco, 1997), and women in the sample tended to have the major responsibility for caring and domestic work (Connell, 2005; Doucet, 1995; Matheson & Summerfield, 2001; Summerfield & Babb, 2004). However, whilst some female participants presented their dominant responsibility for domestic work as a burden, others reported a level of satisfaction in maintaining control. This raised the seemingly contradictory strands of obligation, burden, control, and satisfaction that may occur within this process (Doucet, 1995).

Health was not found to be a key concern, with few participants explicitly associating work-life balance with health issues. Some health concerns were highlighted, including stress and tiredness limiting leisure time, and the positive effects of keeping active through work. However, these were not dominant themes within the narratives. This is contradictory to many quantitative (for example, see Chandola et al., 2004; Emslie et al., 2004; Frone et al., 1997; Grzywacz, 2000) and qualitative (for example, see Hyman et al., 2003; Majomi et al., 2003) studies which have found associations between work-life imbalance and poor health. However, some qualitative studies have more similar findings. For example, Grzywacz and colleagues (2007) found little evidence of work-family conflict being associated with poor health amongst Latino poultry workers in the US. Furthermore, other studies have found more mixed findings about health. For example, a study of employed mothers with primary school aged children in Scotland (Cunningham-Burley et al., 2006) found paid employment to be generally good for health, but that overload of work and domestic life responsibilities was identified by participants as causing them to feel stressed and “shattered” (p.402). A study of female nursing assistants in the US (Nelson, 1997) found that fatigue as a result of occupying multiple roles was common amongst participants, and to a large extent normalised. This normalisation of perceivably ‘common’ health complaints, such as fatigue, may have been underlying participants’ reticence to discuss health in the context of work-life balance.

The findings of the study highlighted the diversity amongst this group of ‘non-professional’ employees, particularly in relation to family backgrounds and career trajectories. This underlines the point that, despite sharing some job characteristics, ‘non-professional’ workers are not a homogenous group.

11.3. Conceptual framework: work/family border theory revisited

Throughout the study work-life balance was examined through the lens of Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory. Clark defined ‘balance’ as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict” (p.751), stating that “though many aspects of work and home are difficult to alter, individuals can shape to some degree the nature of the work and home domains, and the borders and bridges between them, in order to create a desired balance” (p.751). She noted that it is this proactive shaping of domains (work and family) by individuals which differentiates work/family border theory from much of the literature on work and family conflict that assumes individuals to be purely

reactive to their situations. Clark used the diagram below to illustrate the central concepts of work/family border theory (figure 3):

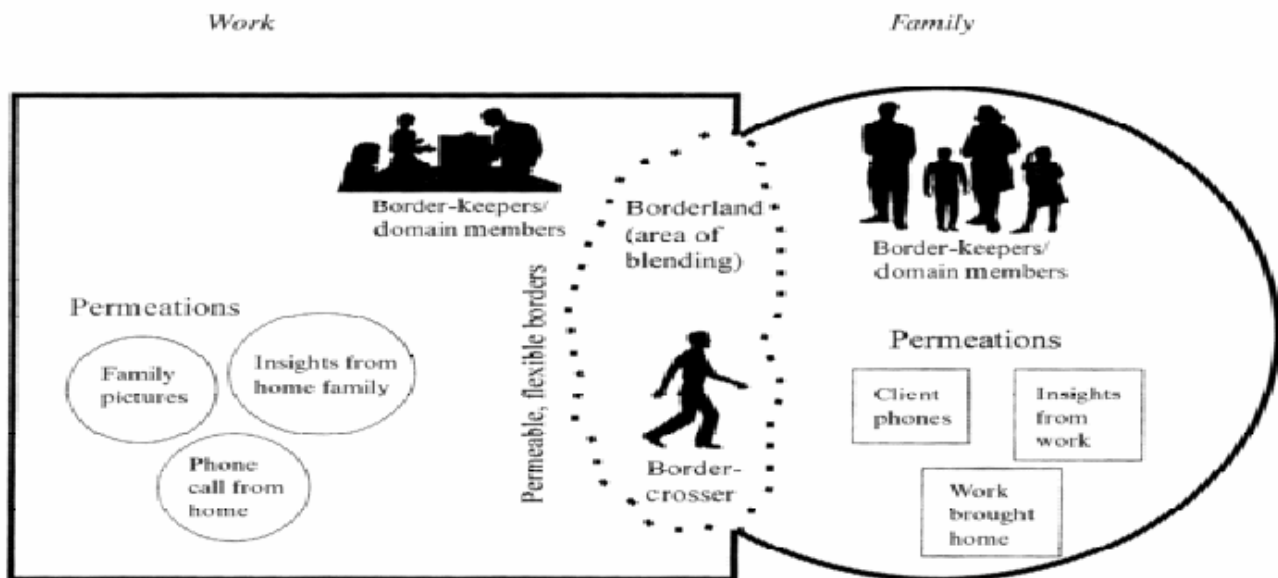


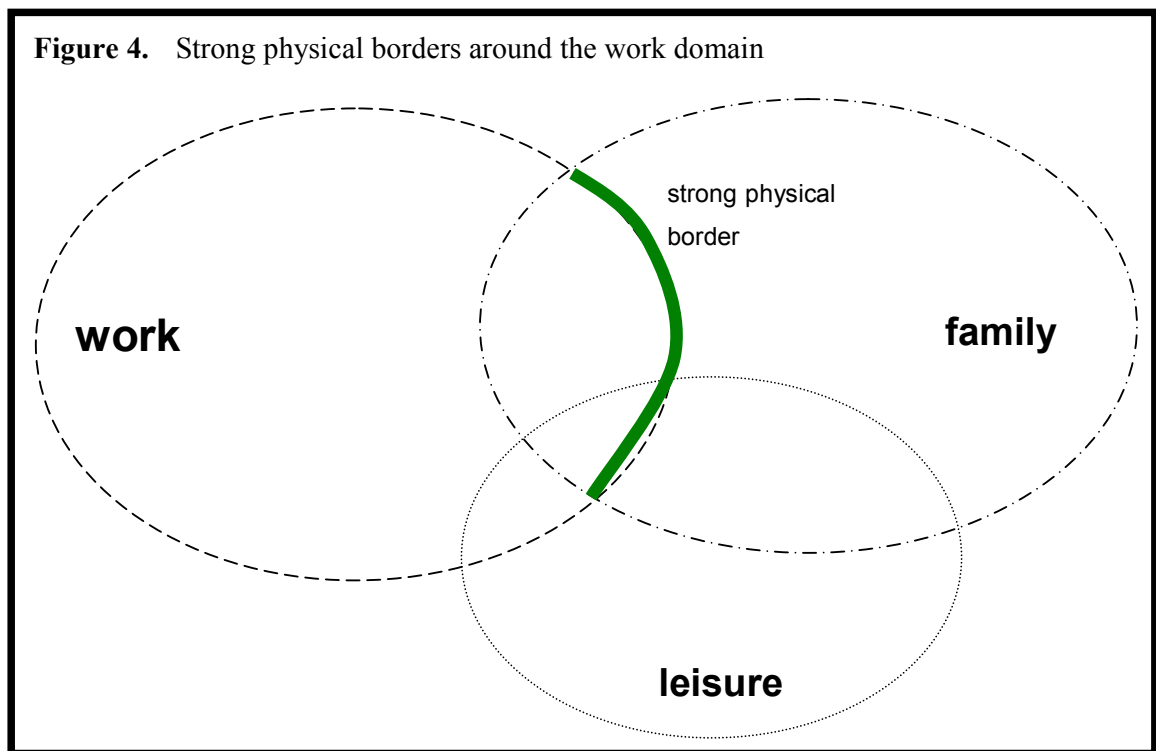
Figure 3. A pictorial representation of work/family border theory (Clark, 2000: p.754)

This research found some support for Clark's theory, and also suggests ways to extend it. Domains may have differing importance according to personal situation. For example, participants who lived alone were more likely to place work and/or leisure as central to their narrative, whereas participants with caring responsibilities placed more importance on family. There was evidence of domains changing importance through time and across the lifecycle. For example, some older members of the sample (particularly women) reflected how their lives had changed as their children had aged, with family having been more central to their lives when their children were younger, whereas leisure became more important as their offspring became more independent. Due to the heterogeneous nature of the sample, in essence, every participant could have their own version of Clark's diagram.

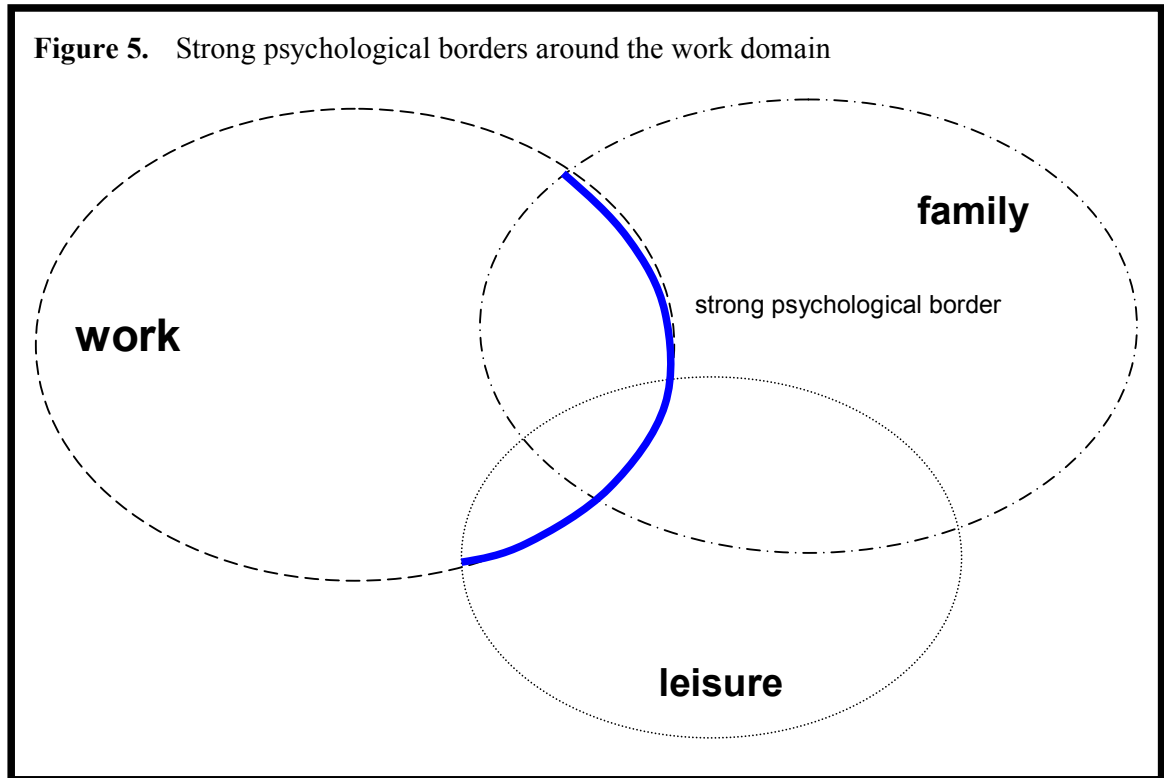
Within the remainder of this section, borders surrounding the work, family, and leisure domains are examined, as well as the importance of gender within the model.

11.3.1. Work/family border theory: the work domain

Borders took different forms for the ResearchOrg sample than for employees working in other occupations (for example see Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Hyman et al., 2003; Linehan & Walsh, 2000; Swanson et al., 1998). As for other studies of people working in low-income jobs (for example see Hyman et al., 2003), the work carried out by the ResearchOrg sample was geographically rooted in the workplace, creating strong physical borders between work and other domains (strong work-to-family and work-to-leisure borders; figure 4).



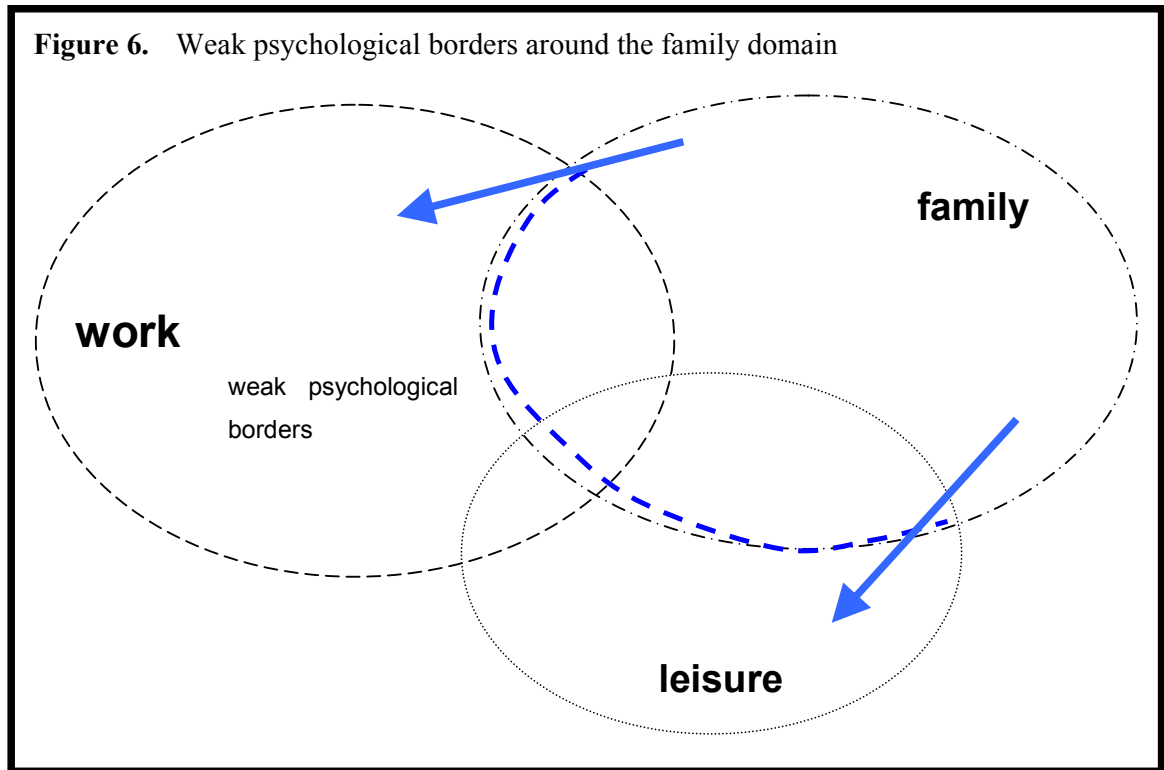
Furthermore, for many participants the psychological borders surrounding work were strong, meaning the thinking patterns, behaviours and emotions associated with paid employment did not commonly permeate into other domains (figure 5). When psychological permeation did occur from the work domain, it was presented as an isolated incident (for example, a disagreement with a colleague), or as inevitable and unproblematic.



The main way in which temporal borders surrounding the work domain were made flexible was in relation to working hours. This was particularly the case for women with caring responsibilities, who were able to access flexibility both through ResearchOrg's formal policies and, more commonly, through informal arrangements with colleagues and line managers.

11.3.2. Work/family border theory: the family domain

Temporal and physical borders between family and other domains were strong. The main form of boundary which was challenged between the family and work domains (family-to-work) were psychological boundaries (for example thinking about family issues at work; figure 6).

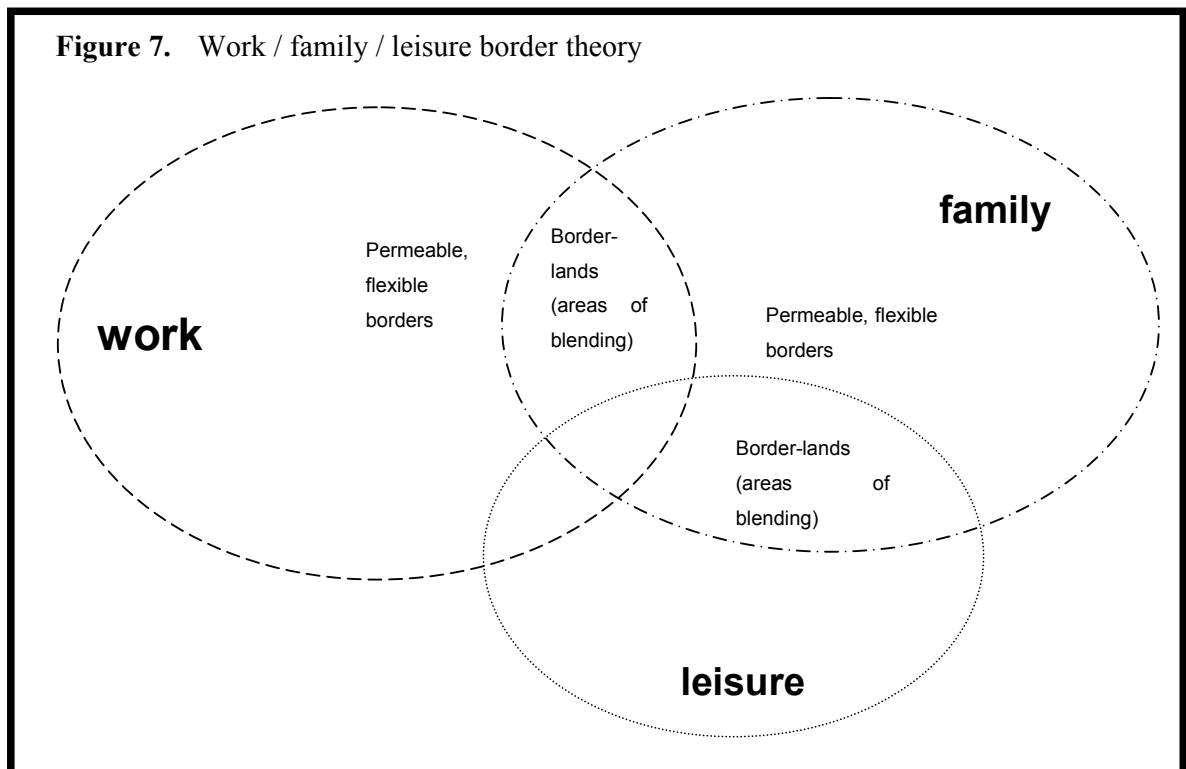


The prioritising of family above other domains may be part of identity work (Cunningham-Burley et al., 2006). As was found in a study of women working in the food retail industry (Backett-Milburn et al., 2008), presentation of self as a ‘good’, reliable worker was often closely entwined with the dominant notion that ‘family comes first’; whilst participants initially presented family as being the priority in their life, maintaining paid employment through being considered a ‘good’ worker was essential in order to provide for their family, thereby making the two identities “intimately connected” (Backett-Milburn et al., 2008: p.485) and mutually dependent. When describing their dedication to paid employment, participants often appeared keen to emphasise their family above all else, thus invoking similar values both at home and work. These conflicting notions may be, to an extent, tied to socioeconomic factors. As with the women working in the food retail sector (Backett-Milburn et al., 2008) and a low-income service industry (Weigt & Solomon, 2008) (and in contrast to studies involving higher income groups who were able to “outsource life” (Halrynjo, 2009: p.119), for example through buying in childcare and cleaners in order to maintain or achieve work-life balance (also see Emslie & Hunt, 2009)), the experiences of many participants in this sample was that work-family management was inextricably tied to “making ends meet” (Weigt & Solomon, 2008: p.641). This indicates that, in addition to gender, the model should consider socio-economic factors in

influencing individuals' ability to shape domains, and the borders and bridges between them.

11.3.3. Work/family border theory and leisure

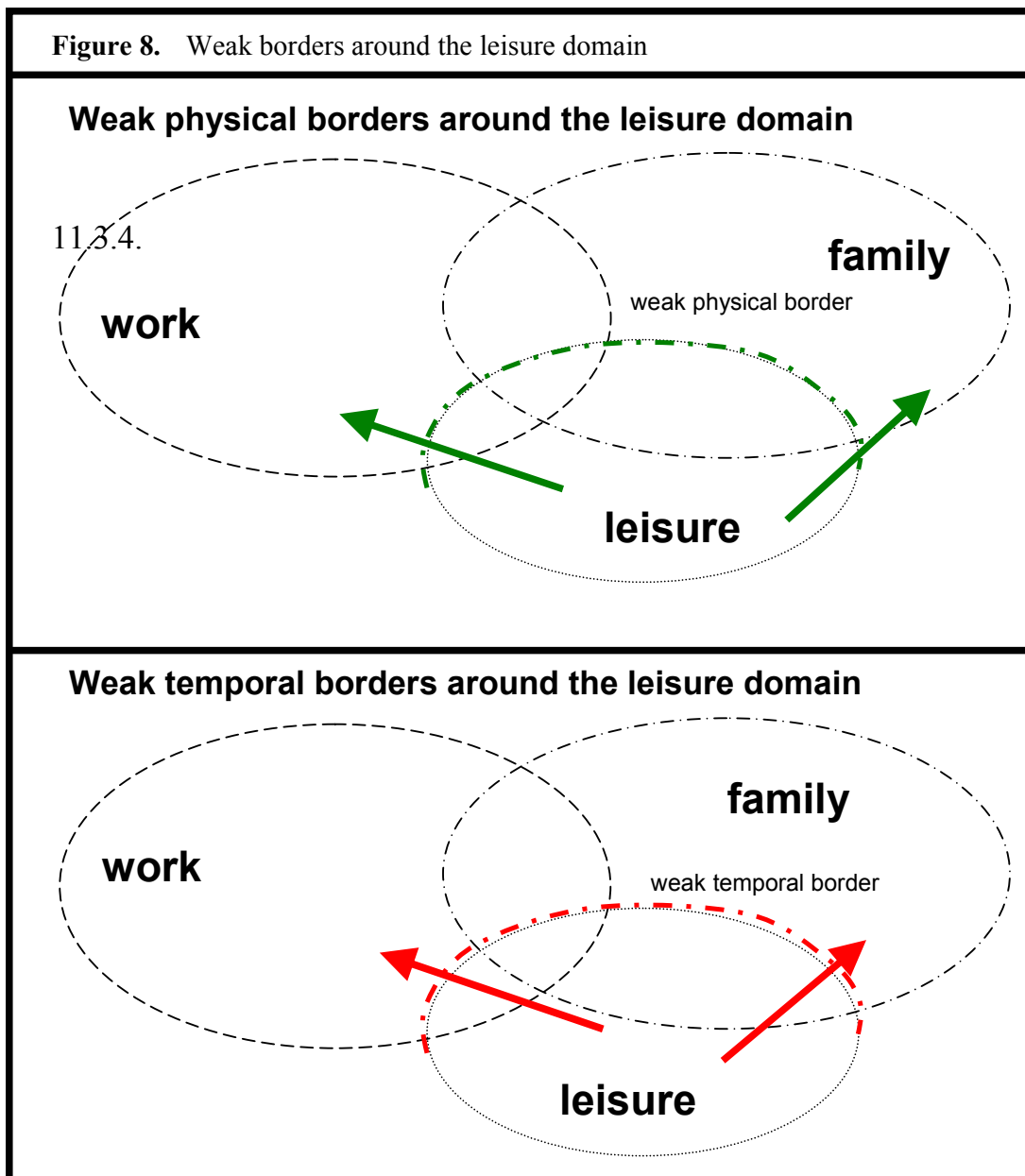
In addition to the domains of work and family incorporated in Clark's theory, a third domain was examined: leisure. In doing so, I aimed to further develop Clark's theory whilst gaining a better understanding of the importance participants attached to leisure. Therefore, developing Clark's original diagram of work/family border theory (figure 3, above), this thesis proposes a model more similar to that shown in figure 7; work/family/leisure border theory.



Leisure was the most commonly compromised domain. This may be linked to the low-income nature of the sample, with money being a higher priority than leisure. The leisure domain increased or decreased in size throughout participants' lives according to changes to the work and family domains. For some participants, leisure existed primarily within paid employment through socialising with colleagues due to responsibilities in the family domain limiting opportunities for leisure. For others, leisure was a small domain due to the effects of combining paid employment and family commitments, for example stress,

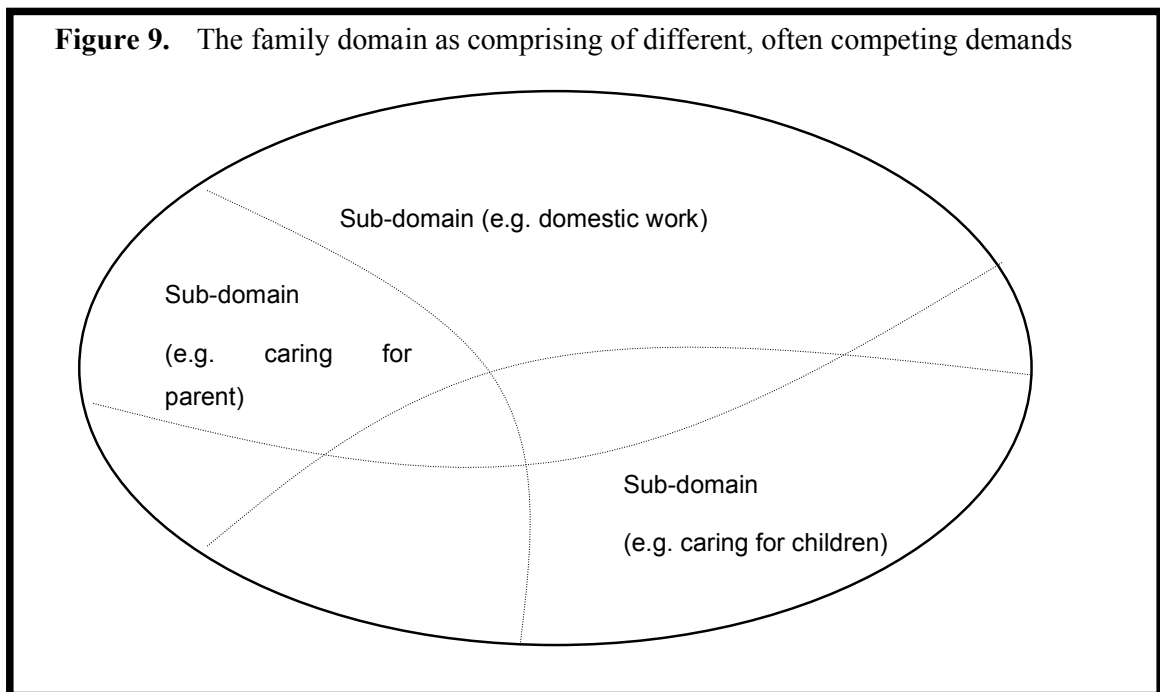
fatigue, and lack of time. In a minority of cases leisure was more independent of the family and work domains. This may have been because work and family did not challenge leisure time, as was the case for some of the older men in the sample, or due to leisure being a protected domain due to a previous incidence of conflict, such as a period of stress or illness.

Borders surrounding leisure were highly flexible and permeable (figure 8), contributing to the constantly shifting nature of the domain. Physical borders were weak due to leisure often taking place within the family or work domain (family leisure or socialising with colleagues), and temporal borders were weak due to leisure taking place at different times (for example, talking with colleagues during a lunch break).



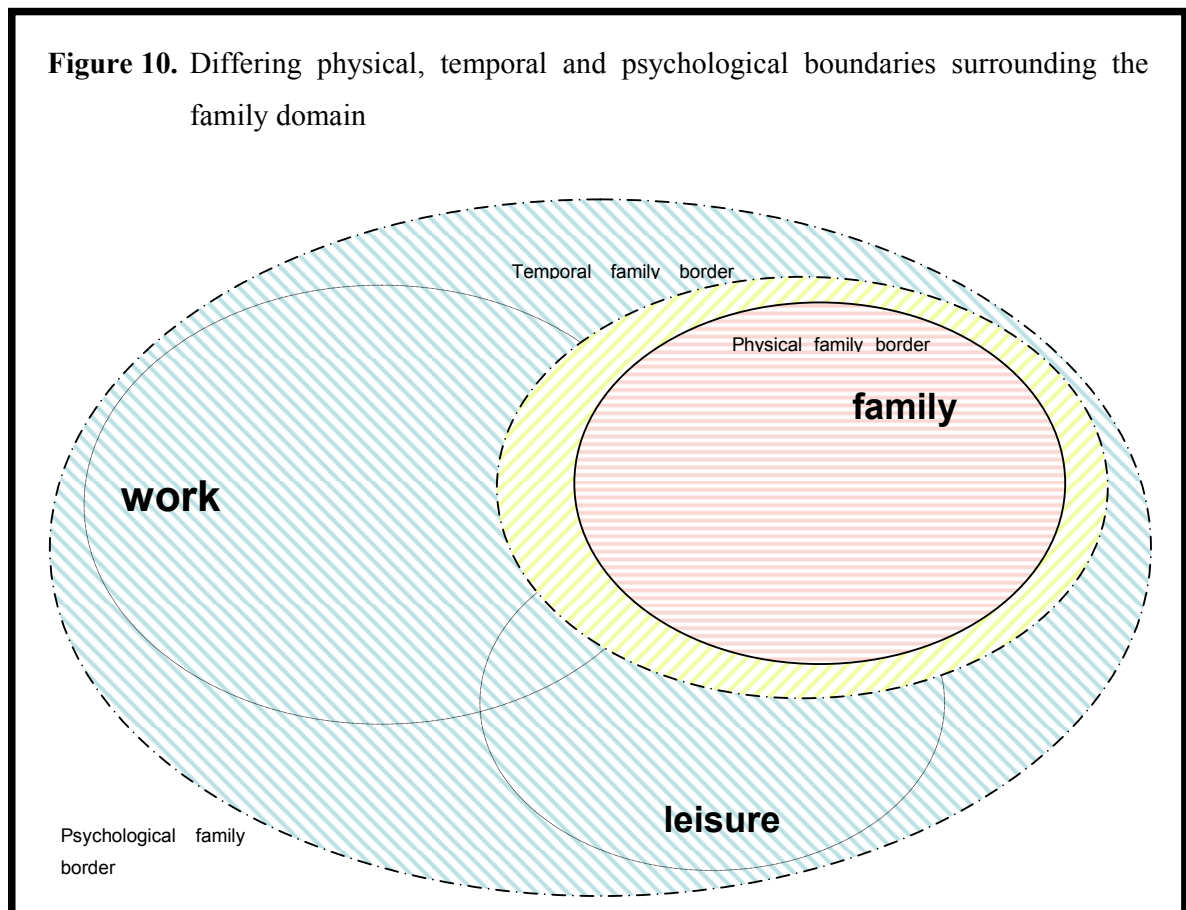
Work/family border theory and gender

This study supports Emslie and Hunt's (2009) finding that understandings of domains, temporal borders, and strength of boundaries are gender specific. Borders, particularly temporal and psychological, took different forms for women and men, with caring responsibilities exaggerating these differences. Firstly, the 'family' domain could be viewed as comprising many different, often conflicting domains ('sub-domains'; figure 9). This was particularly pertinent for women with caring responsibilities, who tended to report majority responsibility for domestic and caring work. The conceptualisation of the family domain being comprised of several sub-domains allows for an understanding of potential imbalance arising within, as well as between, domains.



Secondly, the borders around the family domain took different forms for women and men, again exaggerated by caring responsibilities. Temporal borders were weaker and more flexible for women with caring responsibilities, whereas fathers' roles were often limited to specific tasks, such as collecting children from school. Women also spoke about these practical aspects of caring, but in addition raised broader issues related to their experiences of motherhood, indicating their identity as a mother extended to all areas of life. Therefore, the psychological borders surrounding motherhood may be conceptualised in different ways to fatherhood. For some participants, borders were nonexistent, as the thinking

patterns, behaviours and emotions attached to the family domain permeated all areas of life. For others, the borders were weaker but still existed, with some participants describing ‘switching off’ or ‘unwinding’ from home life in a similar way to how they ‘switched off’ from paid employment. This indicates that, for some, the family domain may take different shapes according to the type of border (figure 10).



11.4. Limitations and strengths of the study

11.4.1. Limitations of the study

One of the main limitations of this study was the self selected nature of the sample. This occurred on two levels: that of the organisation, and the study participants. It is likely that ResearchOrg had an interest in maintaining work-life balance amongst its staff, and therefore felt confident in allowing a researcher to examine this area. This is reflected in both the quantitative and qualitative findings, which found participants generally reported good balance in their lives. Furthermore, the study participants were self selected. Due to

the 'opt-in' nature of the study, it is likely participants had a particular interest in being involved. Prior to the interviews it was anticipated that staff who had a specific concern would volunteer, viewing the interview as an opportunity to have their voice heard, particularly in the context of some ResearchOrg divisions undergoing restructuring at the time of fieldwork. However, few participants raised concerns about work. Some participants spoke about wanting to 'help out' with my studies when they were thanked for participating. This may be due to participants having had direct contact with research students at work, and therefore an understanding of what research entailed.

General population samples may indicate gender differences which are in fact due to differences in the type and level of jobs that women and men hold (Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Emslie et al., 2004; Lundberg, 1996; McElwain et al., 2005). Therefore, efforts were made to recruit a more homogenous sample by conducting the study within a single organisation where women and men worked in similar jobs. However, this aim could not be fully addressed due to the gendered nature of jobs within ResearchOrg, and variations in application of policy and practice across and within divisions. As is the case in the wider labour market, job types were largely segregated by sex; the majority of men were manual workers, and the women were almost exclusively in administrative or technical jobs. Therefore gender and job type were inextricably linked.

Whilst efforts were made to ensure diversity amongst the sample, some groups were under-represented, in particular younger men. Finally, as this study was cross-sectional, the findings cannot address causality within the relationship between work-life balance and health. For example, whilst work-life balance can impact on health, health could also be considered a facilitator for balancing work and home (Williams, 2007).

11.4.2. Strengths of the study

The main strength of the study is that it qualitatively examined work-life balance and health in relation to gender. Many studies concerning work-life balance focus on either gender or health, with few qualitative studies qualitatively exploring associations between the three factors, making this study unusual.

Whilst in recent years more studies have begun to include mixed samples, studies of work-life balance have traditionally focused on women. Furthermore, the majority of studies have used general population samples, or sampled from professional and managerial workplaces (Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991). Therefore a strength of this study is that it

examined the reported experiences of both women and men working in non-professional occupations. The sample included people with diverse personal situations. Whilst this heterogeneity led to some analytical challenges, it has lent depth to an area which has traditionally focused on the reported experiences of working parents (Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Emslie et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2003; Taylor, 2001).

Finally, the study made steps towards incorporating experiences and understandings of leisure within the context of work-life balance. Many analyses have focused primarily on the integration of paid employment with family life (Eby et al., 2005). By assimilating leisure within the analysis, this study has explored the differing importance attached to paid work, family, and leisure amongst participants.

11.5. Reflexivity in the research process

It is important to consider the role of reflexivity in the research process, both in relation to my personal characteristics, and how participants presented themselves to me (Hoddinott & Pill, 1997; Oakley, 1981a; Richards & Emslie, 2000). Each piece of research is “the unique outcome of the characteristics of the individuals and the uniqueness of the time and place in which they interact” (Manderson et al., 2006: p.1319). Whilst it is impossible to hypothesise about what data would have been generated if another researcher had undertaken the study, it is important to acknowledge that my personal characteristics and participants’ perception of my background will have impacted on the research.

I am a white, middle-class woman, from the south-east of England, and was in my mid-twenties when the fieldwork was undertaken. I was open with participants about being a PhD student, which may have reinforced the notion of me being well educated and middle-class. Some participants made indirect references to my personal characteristics. For example, whilst describing a training course she had attended, Cathy indirectly contrasted her own educational attainment with my own:

“I’m certainly not PhD material, but I work hard.”

(Cathy, 38, lived with husband and 2 teenage children, technical, full-time)

An interesting aspect of the research was that participants had a good understanding of what a PhD entailed due to working in close proximity with researchers and research students in the workplace. At the end of some of the interviews participants stated that they

wanted to ‘help out’. This may have given participants a different perspective on educational background than for individuals who had had less contact with PhD students.

There have been many studies examining the impact of gender on the research process (Herod, 1993; McKee & O'Brien, 1983; McKeganey & Bloor, 1991; Oakley, 1981a). Whilst I was not overtly aware of the influence of my gender on the research process, it is likely to have had an impact; no study can take place in a “gender vacuum” (Herod, 1993: p.306). There was only one occasion where this was evident, when Colin made a remark regarding his (female) line-manager which I suspected he may not have made had I been a man:

“I’m no being sexist...”

(Colin, 50, lived with elderly parents, manual, full-time)

11.6. Ideas for future research

The findings of this thesis highlight a number of areas which warrant further study. Whilst contributing to the work-life balance literature by exploring reported experiences of ‘non-professional’ employees, the ResearchOrg employees were all in what Karasek and colleagues (1981) would term ‘low-strain’ jobs. Therefore further study of women and men working ‘high-strain’, ‘non-professional’ occupations who may experience boundaries in different ways, such as builders or manufacturing, would be interesting.

Furthermore, whilst these findings can be contrasted with those of studies of people in professional occupations, a more systematic comparative study of women and men working in both ‘non-professional’ and professional occupations within the same company would allow for more meaningful comparisons. Other comparisons would also be interesting, for example by age or family type (Lewis et al., 2003). The findings provide some evidence for experiences of work-life balance changing across the lifecourse and according to family situation. A more systematic comparison of these groups would lend further insight into this area.

Finally, as highlighted above, due to its cross-sectional nature, this study cannot comment on causality of balance or imbalance with health factors. A longitudinal study would allow for this, further exploring the contention that health could be considered a facilitator as well as an outcome of work-life balance or imbalance.

11.7. Policy and practice implications

As has been found for other studies of low-income groups, “there can be no single or simple policy solution to the diverse needs and aspirations signified by the different scenarios identified in the study” (Dean, 2007: p.533). With this in mind, this section considers the implications of the findings for work-life balance related policy and practice.

Firstly, flexible working policies which allow workers to have greater control over the location and scheduling of their working hours may not be applicable to employees in administrative, manual and technical jobs. Due to the nature of their work, the majority of participants were restricted to carrying out their work in a set location, at a set time. Therefore, ‘flexitime’ (core hours of work with a flexible beginning or end of their working day) and ‘flexiplace’ (working from home for all or part of the week) policies may not be applicable to these employees. Furthermore, due to the low paid nature of their work, income and the importance of providing for self and family often predominated over considerations of work-life balance. Therefore work-life balance policies may not be viewed as applicable by some ‘non-professional’ employees.

This study also contributes to understandings of ‘non-professional’ employees, challenging assumptions some may have about the nature of ‘non-professional’ work. Far from being a homogenous group, this sample was diverse in relation to personal situation and career trajectories. Conceptions of paid work differed; whilst some described it as being mundane or boring, the majority described it positively. Some participants described actively choosing their job, and expressed satisfaction with the low strain nature of their work (regardless of the underlying issues of choice and agency behind these decisions). Thus assumptions about the problems of employing over-qualified individuals for ‘non-professional’ jobs may be mistaken.

The finding that gender norms were embedded within the sample, indicates the importance of addressing broader structural, social, and cultural issues (Caproni, 2004). It supports other studies which have called for a re-examination of gender norms and divisions of labour within all domains in order to improve work-life choices for both women and men (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005; Loscocco, 1997).

Finally, caring responsibilities were found to exacerbate gender norms and differences in experiences of work-life balance (Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Linehan & Walsh, 2000; Stockley & Daly, 1999). This indicates that, in the same way that gender neutral policies

can sometime both hide and reinforce gender inequalities (Lewis et al., 2003), work-life balance policies may need to account for the differing needs of employees caring for both children and adults.

12. Appendices

12.1. Appendix A: Coding sheet for abstracts on gender, work-life balance and health

First author:

Title

Publication date:

Journal:

Country of study:

Work-life balance

Does the abstract summary:

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| a) Mention work-life balance (or similar) in the summary | Yes | No |
| b) What phrase does it use? | | |
| c) Address work-life balance issues? | Yes | No |
| d) Is work-life balance a primary focus of the study? | Yes | No |

Gender

Does the abstract summary:

- | | | |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------|
| a) Show both sexes are included? | Yes (with numbers) | Yes (without numbers) |
| | Only women | Only men |
| | No | |
| b) Mention gender differences and/or similarities? | Yes | No |
| c) Address gender issues? | Yes | No |
| d) Is gender a primary focus of the study? | Yes | No |

Health

Does the abstract summary:

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| a) Mention health? | Yes | No |
| b) What kind of health is mentioned? | | |
| c) Address health issues? | Yes | No |
| d) Is health a primary focus of the study? | Yes | No |

Methods

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------|-------------|
| a) What methods are used in the study? | Quantitative | Qualitative |
| b) If qualitative, what methods? | Semi-structured interviews | |
| | Focus groups | |
| | Participant observation | |
| | Other | |

Setting of study

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Single work-place | Multiple work-places | Type of occupation |
| Family type | Geographical area | Other |
| Is the paper worth reading? | Yes | No |

12.2. Appendix B: Scoping exercise - Economic Development Agencies topic guide

Research objective:

The aim of my research is to investigate the strategies non-professional working parents employ to manage their work-life balance, and how their work-life balance impacts on their health.

Interview aim:

The aim of this interview is:

- To find out the organisation's perceptions of their clients' experiences of work-life balance
- To explore the challenges and benefits these experiences may have brought to their clients
- To further develop ideas for research

Design

This part of my research will involve a number of interviews with Economic Development Agencies around Glasgow that provide employability services and skills training in deprived areas. This will not contribute to my main research data for analysis, but instead will aid me in developing the questions I will ask for my research.

1. Introduction

- Introduction to me and the study
- Explain the aim of this interview in the wider context of my research
- Explain about confidentiality and will be taking notes

2. Background

Brief background information:

- Economic Development Agency
- What services does the organisation provide?
- Who uses the services?
- Rough number of men and women?

3. Work-life balance

- What does the phrase 'work-life balance' mean to your clients?

4. Policies

- Do you feel that your clients are aware of work-life balance related legislation?
 - Probe: maternity & paternity leave, carers allowance, etc...

5. Challenges / barriers

- What do you feel are the challenges that work-life balance issues present to your clients?
- What do you feel are the benefits?

6. Interest in study?

- For my main study I will be looking to recruit male and female blue-collar workers of different ages to interview. If I was to recruit from a company, would your organisation be interested in taking part?

7. Anything else?

- Are there any other issues you wish to raise?

Thank you for making the time to meet with me

12.3. Appendix C: Scoping exercise: Economic Development Agencies topic guide

Research objective:

The aim of my research is to investigate the strategies non-professional working parents employ to manage their work-life balance, and how their work-life balance impacts on their health.

Interview aim:

The aim of this interview is:

- To find out the organisation's perceptions of their clients' experiences of work-life balance
- To explore the challenges and benefits these experiences may have brought to their clients
- To further develop ideas for research

Design

This part of my research will involve a number of interviews with Economic Development Agencies around Glasgow that provide employability services and skills training in deprived areas. This will not contribute to my main research data for analysis, but instead will aid me in developing the questions I will ask for my research.

1. Introduction

- Introduction to me and the study
- Explain the aim of this interview in the wider context of my research
- Explain about confidentiality and will be taking notes

2. Background

Brief background information:

- Economic Development Agency
- What services does the organisation provide?
- Who uses the services?
- Rough number of men and women?

3. Work-life balance

- What does the phrase ‘work-life balance’ mean to your clients?

4. Policies

- Do you feel that your clients are aware of work-life balance related legislation?
 - Probe: maternity & paternity leave, carers allowance, etc...

5. Challenges / barriers

- What do you feel are the challenges that work-life balance issues present to your clients?
- What do you feel are the benefits?

6. Interest in study?

- For my main study I will be looking to recruit male and female blue-collar workers of different ages to interview. If I was to recruit from a company, would your organisation be interested in taking part?

7. Anything else?

- Are there any other issues you wish to raise?

Thank you for making the time to meet with me

12.4. Appendix D: Scoping exercise: Trade Unions topic guide

Research objective:

The aim of my research is to investigate the strategies non-professional working parents employ to manage their work-life balance, and how their work-life balance impacts on their health.

Interview aim:

The aim of this interview is:

- To find out the organisation's policies regarding work-life balance
- To find out the organisation's perceptions of their members' experiences of work-life balance
- To explore the challenges and benefits these experiences may have brought to members and their employers
- To further develop ideas for research

Design

This part of my research will involve a number of interviews with Trade Union organisers that represent workers in predominantly blue collar and non-professional occupations. This will not contribute to my main research data for analysis, but instead will aid me in developing the questions I will ask for my research.

1. Introduction

- Introduction to me and the study
- Explain the aim of this interview in the wider context of my research
- Explain about confidentiality and will be taking notes

4. Background

Brief background information:

- Trade Union
- How many members does the Union have?
- What occupations does the Union represent?
- Rough number of men and women?

5. Work-life balance

- What does the phrase ‘work-life balance’ mean to your Union?

4. Policies

- Does your Union have any policies relating to these areas you’ve raised?
 - Probe: maternity & paternity care, flexible working, caring leave, sick leave, career breaks?
- How does the Union communicate these policies to their members?

5. Challenges / barriers

- What do you feel are the challenges these policies present to employers and employees?
- What do you feel are the benefits of these policies?
 - Probe: to organisation, to employees

6. Interest in study?

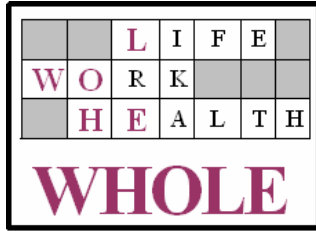
- For my main study I will be looking to recruit male and female blue-collar workers of different ages to interview. If I was to recruit from a company, would your organisation be interested in taking part?

7. Anything else?

- Are there any other issues you wish to raise?

Thank you for making the time to meet with me

12.5. Appendix E: Interview consent form



The **WHOLE** Study: Work, Life & Health Consent form

The purpose of this form is to ensure that your contribution to the above research project is in strict accordance with your wishes.

I have read the information sheet that describes this study, and agree to take part in an individual interview.

I give permission for this interview to be recorded.

I understand that I **do not** need to answer all the questions if I do not wish to and that I may take a break or leave the interview at any time.

I am aware that any information I provide will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Tapes, transcripts and all related documents will be locked away and only available to the research team.

I give permission for brief extracts of what I say to be used for research purposes (including research publications and reports), with strict preservation of anonymity. I understand that the interview will remain confidential and become the property of the MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit.

Signed _____ Date _____

Name (block capitals please) _____

Address _____

12.6. Appendix F: introductory letter to companies



"[Click here and insert recipient's name/address]"

March 2006

Dear "[click here and type the addressee's name]"

Re: Work-life balance and health

I am writing to you to discuss the possibility of conducting an important study within a Glasgow branch of [xxx]. I wish to investigate how employees juggle the demands of work and other aspects of their lives, and how this might impact on their health. Work-life balance is an issue of increasing importance in the UK. As a company that [xxxx], I feel this would be an exciting opportunity.

I am a postgraduate student funded by the UK Medical Research Council, a body funded by but independent of government, which aims to improve human health and quality of life. I am based at the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow. The Unit's mission is to study social and environmental influences on health.

The main focus of the study would be individual meetings with xxx employees about their experiences of balancing work and other areas of life, and their health. I would also like to talk to relevant managers about their experiences of implementing work-life balance related policies within the workplace and the benefits and challenges this may bring. Throughout the study I will endeavour to have as little impact on xxx daily working practices as possible.

Participation of colleagues and managers would be entirely voluntary and completely confidential. My research activities are bound by strict MRC and University of Glasgow ethical guidelines.

I would be happy to produce a summary report of my findings following my fieldwork.

I would very much appreciate it if we could talk over this proposal in more detail. I will phone at the beginning of next week to try to arrange an appointment to discuss the possibility of your organisation taking part. If there is someone else it would be more appropriate for me to contact, either in head office or at a local store, please let me know. I would welcome the opportunity to provide more information either about my proposal or the work of the unit.

Yours sincerely

Ms Sarah Gurney

Postgraduate Student

12.7. Appendix G: Introductory information leaflet



Work, life, and health amongst parents in Scotland: Information for companies

What is this study about?

I would like to talk to mothers and fathers working for [XXX] about their experiences of juggling work and other aspects of their life, and how this impacts on their health.

Why do I want to work with [XXX]?

I would like to work with [XXX] as a company that promotes diversity and flexibility amongst its workforce, and has a number of stores in the Glasgow area.

Whilst there has been a lot of research carried out examining work-life balance and health amongst 'office based' occupations, particularly amongst female employees, there has been relatively little research working with both men and women on the 'shop floor' of the retail sector. Superstores stores such as [XXX] are an important part of the UK economy and people's way of life. I therefore feel that [XXX] would be a really interesting and relevant company to work with.

What will the study involve?

I would like to meet with roughly 40 [XXX] 'shop floor' employees to learn about their experiences of work-life balance and health. This would involve individual discussions lasting approximately 45 minutes. I will ask them a range of questions regarding their experiences of managing their working life in relation to family and other areas of life. The questions will be open-ended and non-judgemental as I am interested in finding out about their individual experiences. Discussions will be recorded in agreement with participants, to ensure I have an accurate record of what is said.

Whilst the focus of the study will be speaking to 'shop floor' employees, I would also like to meet with relevant managers to find out about [XXX's] policies and practices regarding work-life balance and health, and their experiences of implementing these policies.

Throughout the study I will endeavour to have as little impact on [XXX's] daily working practices as possible.

Will the interviews be confidential?

Yes. Short extracts of what is said may be used in academic journals, but I will not use names or any information that might identify individuals. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the tapes and related documents. The Medical Research Council requires us to store all documents securely for ten years, in accordance with the MRC guidelines on good practice.

How will employees be selected to take part in the study?

Ideally I would like to carry out a short (2 page) questionnaire to find out some basic information about your employees. This would include non-intrusive questions regarding their family (number of children, caring responsibilities, etc) and their working patterns (how long they've worked for [XXX], average number of hours worked a week, etc). I will also ask a question about their work-life balance and their health. Using a questionnaire will allow me to gain a better understanding of employees before I meet with them.

Are there any other aspects of the study?

There are a few other things that I would find useful to do, if practical for you, but these are not essential to my study. For example, I would like to see copies of any relevant policies, guidelines and handbooks. If possible I would also be interested in attending any training sessions you may have for new or continuing employees. You may also have suggestions of other activities I may find useful to better understand work-life balance and health within XX.

I am keen to have as little impact on [XXX's] daily working practices as possible, and would therefore like to discuss the best way of carrying out this study with you.

What will the information be used for?

The information collected from my research will be studied and the findings will form the basis of my PhD, published in academic journals and presented to academics and policy makers. I am also happy to produce a summary report of my findings for [XXX] stores.

Will this study cost [XXX] anything?

I will cover all direct costs involved in the study.

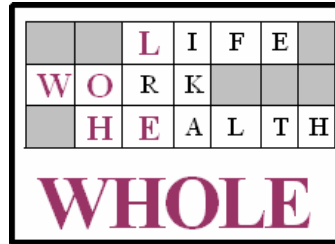
Please contact **Sarah Gurney** if you have any questions about the study, or would like more information.

Direct line: 0141-3577534

E-mail: sarah@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk

Address: MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow. G12 8RZ

12.8. Appendix H: Screening questionnaire



< < IDNO > >

Postal Questionnaire

This questionnaire is strictly **confidential** and will only be seen by researchers working on the WHOLE study. Please see the enclosed leaflet for more details.

Most of these questions ask you to tick a box. A few will ask you to write something down.

At the end there is a form asking if you'd be interested in taking part in an individual interview about the issues covered in the questionnaire. **This is a really important part of the WHOLE study so please do consider taking part.**

Please complete this questionnaire and return it in the pre-paid envelope.

1 What is your job title?

2 Where do you work?
(department / unit name)

3 Are you in:

please complete one answer only

Band 6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Band 7	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4 How long have you worked for [ResearchOrg]? years

Less than a year (tick box)

5 How many hours a week do you normally work?

Standard hours: <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	hours
Paid overtime: <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	hours
Extra hours without pay: <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	hours

6 Do you normally work any hours outside the 'usual' working week?
(early mornings before 8am, evenings after 7pm or weekend work)

Please complete one answer only


Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

7 Thinking about the hours you work, would you prefer to:

Please complete one answer only

Work <u>fewer</u> hours than you do now	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work <u>more</u> hours than you do now	<input type="checkbox"/>
Carry on working the same number of hours	<input type="checkbox"/>

8 What factors do you consider when looking for a job?

	not important	quite important	important	very important	not applicable
Pay	1	2	3	4	5
Location of workplace	1	2	3	4	5
Holidays	1	2	3	4	5
Interest in job	1	2	3	4	5
Pension	1	2	3	4	5
Career development prospects	1	2	3	4	5
Friendly people	1	2	3	4	5
Job security	1	2	3	4	5
Training opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Flexible working arrangements (e.g. compressed hours, part-time, job share etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Good maternity/paternity leave	1	2	3	4	5
Other (if other, what?) 					

9 Thinking about your current job,

How do you rate...	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very good	not applicable
Pay	1	2	3	4	5
Location of workplace	1	2	3	4	5
Holidays	1	2	3	4	5
Interest in job	1	2	3	4	5
Pension	1	2	3	4	5
Career development prospects	1	2	3	4	5
Friendly people	1	2	3	4	5
Job security	1	2	3	4	5
Training opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Flexible working arrangements (e.g. compressed hours, part-time, job share etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Good maternity/paternity leave	1	2	3	4	5

10 Overall, how satisfied would you say you are with your job?

Please complete one answer only

Very satisfied	1
Satisfied	2
Quite satisfied	3
Not very satisfied	4

11 Are you:

Please complete one answer only

Male	1
Female	2

12 What year were you born?

~~✗~~

13 Are you currently living with a spouse or partner?

Please complete one answer only

Yes	1
No	2

14 a Do you have any children living at home with you?
(including biological, step and adopted children)

Please complete one answer only

Yes	1	↓ 14 b & c
No	2	→ 15a

14 b If yes, how many?

~~✗~~ children

14 c If yes, how old are they?

✗ Child 1	<input type="text"/>	years
Child 2	<input type="text"/>	years
Child 3	<input type="text"/>	years
Child 4	<input type="text"/>	years
Child 5	<input type="text"/>	years

15 a Do you look after, or provide any regular care or help for any sick, elderly or disabled adults?

(for example, help with shopping, cleaning or running errands)

Please complete **one** answer only

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	↓ 15 b
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	→ 16

15 b If yes, approximately how many hours a week care do you provide?

<input type="checkbox"/>	hours
--------------------------	-------

16 What is your ethnic group?

Please tick the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background

White	UK	
	Irish	
	Greek	
	Turkish	
	Jewish	
	Kurdish	
	Other	
Mixed	White and Black Caribbean	
	White and Black African	
	White and Asian	
	Any other mixed background	
Asian or Asian British	Indian	
	Pakistani	
	Bangladeshi	
	Chinese	
	Vietnamese	
	Any other Asian background	
Black or Black British	Somali	
	Ugandan	
	Nigerian	
	Ghanaian	
	Other black African background	
	Caribbean	
	Black British	
	Any other black background	
Other ethnic group	Other	

17 To what extent does your family life and family responsibilities interfere with your performance on your job in any of the following ways...

Would you say:-	not at all	to some extent	a great deal	not applicable
Family matters reduce the time you can devote to your job	1	2	3	4
Family worries or problems distract you from your work	1	2	3	4
Family activities stop you getting the amount of sleep you need to do your job well	1	2	3	4
Family obligations reduce the time you need to relax or be by yourself	1	2	3	4

18 To what extent do your job responsibilities interfere with your family life in the following ways...

Would you say:-	not at all	to some extent	a great deal	not applicable
Your job reduces the amount of time you can spend with the family	1	2	3	4
Problems at work make you irritable at home	1	2	3	4
Your work involves a lot of time away from home	1	2	3	4
Your job takes up so much energy you don't feel up to doing things that need attention at home	1	2	3	4

19 To what extent does having both work and family responsibilities...

Would you say:-	not at all	to some extent	a great deal	not applicable
Make you a more rounded person	1	2	3	4
Gives your life more variety	1	2	3	4
Allows you to use all your talents	1	2	3	4
Means you can manage your time better	1	2	3	4
Clarifies your priorities	1	2	3	4

20 Do you have any comments about your 'work life balance'?

In other words, how happy you are with the way you divide your life up between work, family, caring for others, chores and leisure?



21 Over the last 12 months would you say that your health on the whole has been:

Please complete one answer only

Excellent	<input type="text"/>	1
Good	<input type="text"/>	2
Fair	<input type="text"/>	3
Poor	<input type="text"/>	4

22 Within the last month have you suffered from problems with...

Please complete one answer on each line only

	Yes	No
Difficulty sleeping	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Nerves	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Always feeling tired	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Difficulty concentrating	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Worrying over every little things	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

23 a Do you have any long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits your daily activities or the work you can do?

Please complete one answer only

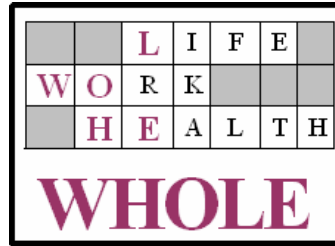
Yes	<input type="text"/>	↓ 23 b
No	<input type="text"/>	

23 b If yes, please give details.



It's almost over... but not yet

Please turn over



In the next few weeks I will be looking for volunteers to talk to in more detail about their experiences of juggling work and other aspects of their life.

This is a really important part of the WHOLE study so please do consider taking part!!

The interviews will last approximately one hour and will take place at a mutually convenient time.

All discussions will be **confidential** and we will not tell [ResearchOrg] what you say at an individual level.

If you'd like to talk to me please fill in your details below.

Completing this form does not commit you to talk to me and you are free to change your mind at any time.

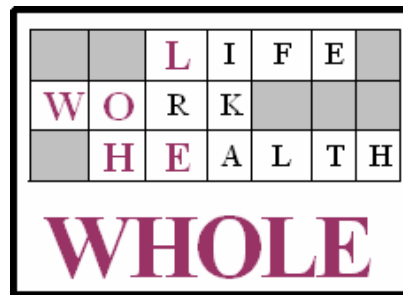
Forename		Surname	
Mobile		Home phone	
Email			
Address			
Town		Postcode	

And that's it.

Please return the questionnaire to us in the pre-paid envelope.

Thank you !

12.9. Appendix I: Screening questionnaire information sheet



I am writing to invite **YOU** to take part in an important study looking at [ResearchOrg administrative, technical and manual] employees' experiences of juggling work, life and health.

I am really keen to hear your views on this important issue!

This leaflet contains some information about the study. Please take a few minutes to read through it and complete the enclosed questionnaire.

Everything you tell me will be kept entirely confidential.

Who am I?

I am a PhD research student based at the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow. The Unit's mission is to study social and environmental influences on health.

What is this study about?

I am interested in men's and women's experiences of juggling work and other aspects of their life, and how this impacts on their health. I would like to hear from **YOU** about **YOUR** personal experiences, whatever they are.

Why are your views important?

I am sending this questionnaire to [**administrative, technical and manual**] employees within [ResearchOrg] in order to find out about as many people's experiences as possible. Research usually focuses on the experiences of managers, researchers and academics. In this study we want to learn about the experiences of other staff.

Whilst taking part is unlikely to directly benefit you, it is hoped that taking part in this study will help other people in the future. If you are interested in the findings of this study, I can send you a summary once it is completed.

What do you have to do?

If you would like to take part, please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to me in the pre-paid envelope. The questionnaire is short and should take you about 5-10 minutes to complete.

At the back of the questionnaire there is a form asking whether you would like to talk to me in more detail about juggling work and other areas of your life. If you would like to take part please fill in the form and return it to me.

Do you have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to return the questionnaire.

Will the [ResearchOrg] see your questionnaire?

No. [ResearchOrg] will see a summary of the research findings but they will not see any specific information regarding who takes part and what they say. All names and identities of people who return questionnaires will be anonymised.

What will happen if you take part?

If you return the questionnaire, I will look at the information you give me and combine it with the information from other people's questionnaires.

If you complete the form at the back of the questionnaire I may contact you again to invite you to take part in a confidential individual interview about your personal experiences of juggling work and other areas of life. Discussions will last about an hour, and will take place at a mutually convenient time.

What will the information be used for?

This questionnaire is part of my Medical Research Council funded PhD studentship, known as the **WHOLE** study. The information from the questionnaires will be studied and the findings will be used as part of my PhD, published in academic journals and presented to academics and policy makers.

The **WHOLE** study has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Science at the University of Glasgow.

Will the information you provide be kept confidential?

Yes. Neither your name nor any information that may identify you will be used, so that you remain anonymous. Only myself and my two supervisors at the University of Glasgow will have access to the questionnaires and related documents. I am required to store all documents securely for ten years, in accordance with the MRC guidelines on good practice.

Who can you contact if you want more information?

Please contact me if you have any questions about the study, or would like more information.

Direct line: 0141-3577534

E-mail: sarah@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk

Address: MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow. G12 8RZ

If you would like to talk to someone not directly involved with the research to raise any concerns, please contact **Kate Hunt**, the Postgraduate Students' Convenor at the Social & Public Health Sciences Unit

Phone: 0141-3573949

E-mail: Kate@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk

Address: MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow. G12 8RZ



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12.10. Appendix J: Interview topic guide



The WHOLE Study: Interview schedule

Research objectives

To investigate the strategies ‘non-professional’ workers employ to manage their work-life balance, and how their work-life balance impacts on their health.

Notes on the interview schedule

This interview schedule covers a number of themes: work-life, home-life, relaxation / leisure, change, time, health, and the boundaries and overlaps between different areas of life. Some of these themes are covered in specific sections and others throughout the interview.

Whilst the interview schedule contains some very specific questions, the ethos of the interview is to be as open ended and non-leading as possible, whilst focusing on the research objectives. It is likely that participants will touch on some areas when answering other questions. Where possible I will probe in order to gain a better understanding of what exactly individuals mean. In some areas, such as the work section, I use very specific questions in order to understand about specific experiences, opinions etc. In other sections, such as relaxation, I am a lot more general as I anticipate that participants’ experiences will be very varied. In this section I hope to draw more on what the interviewee says and lead the interview from there.

Introduction

- Introduce myself
- Introduce study, who funded by, what the purpose is
- Explain that I'm interested in how 'non-professional' employees juggle work and other aspects of their lives, and how this impacts on their health.
- Explain that it's **their** experiences and opinions I'm after – there are no right or wrong answers.
- Explain confidentiality, tape recording, they don't have to answer all questions and that they can take a break or stop the interview at any time.
- Ask if any questions
- Consent form

Work

- Tell me about yourself
- Tell me about your work. What do you do on a day-to-day basis?
- Are there times that are busier or quieter than others?
- Has the job changed over time?
- What happens if you're off from work?
- Have you ever taken time off for a non-work emergency? Can you give me an example? What happened at work?
- Do you think you'll stay in your job for the foreseeable future?
- Do you think your work affects your health, positively or negatively?

Home

- Can you tell me what you do when you get home from work? And at the weekends?
- Who does what around the house?
- Has there been any changes in the home?²⁹
- Do you think anything at home affects your health, positively or negatively?

Relaxation

- What do you do to relax?
- Is there anything that you'd like to do that you don't? Why?

Work-life balance

- If you hear the phrase 'work-life balance' what does it make you think about? What does that mean for you? How's your work-life balance?
- Is there anything else you'd like to say

²⁹ NB: this question was usually covered in other areas

12.11. Appendix K: Interview summary grid

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

Name of respondent: _____

Job title: _____

Grade: _____

Their work

Hours worked per week: _____

How long worked for company: _____

Children**Partner: Yes / No**

	age
Child 1	
Child 2	
Child 3	

Other caring responsibilities: Yes / No

Number of hours a week	
------------------------	--

Health over the last 12 months:

Excellent	
Good	
Fair	
Poor	

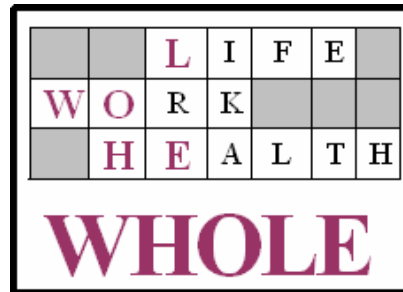
Health within the last month:

Difficulty sleeping	
Nerves	
Always feeling tired	
Difficulty concentrating	
Worrying over every little things	

Disability: Yes / No

Details:

12.12. Appendix L: Interview information leaflet



The WHOLE Study:

Information Sheet

This leaflet contains some information about the study. Please take a few minutes to read through it before beginning the interview.

Everything you tell me will be treated with the strictest of confidence.



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What is this study about?

I am interested in men's and women's experiences of juggling work and other aspects of their life, and how this impacts on their health. I would like to hear from **YOU** about **YOUR** personal experiences, whatever they are.

Why are your views important?

I will be holding a small number of individual confidential interviews with men and women working in [administrative, technical and manual jobs] within [ResearchOrg] so I can hear as many different people's experiences as possible. Research usually focuses on the experiences of managers, researchers and academics. In this study we want to learn about the experiences of other staff.

Whilst taking part is unlikely to directly benefit you, it is hoped that taking part in this study will help other people in the future. If you are interested in the findings of this study, I can send you a summary once it is completed.

What do you have to do?

The interview will take roughly an hour and will take part during work or at a mutually convenient time.

I will be recording the interview to make sure I have an accurate record of what is said. At the beginning of the session I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you agree to take part and be recorded.

Do you have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.

What will the information be used for?

This interview is part of my Medical Research Council funded PhD studentship, known as the **WHOLE** study. The information from the interviews will be studied and the findings will be used as part of my PhD, published in academic journals and presented to academics and policy makers.

The **WHOLE** study has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Science at the University of Glasgow.

Will the information you provide be kept confidential?

Yes. Neither your name nor any information that may identify you will be used, so that you remain anonymous. Only myself and my two supervisors at the University of Glasgow will have access to the tapes, questionnaires and related documents. I am required to store all documents securely for ten years, in accordance with the MRC guidelines on good practice.

Will [ResearchOrg] know what is said?

No. [ResearchOrg] will see a summary of the research findings but they will not see any specific information regarding who takes part and what they say. All names and identities of people who take part will be anonymised.

Who can you contact if you want more information?

Please contact **Sarah Gurney** if you have any questions about the study, or would like more information.

Direct line: 0141-3577534

E-mail: sarah@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk

Address: MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow. G12 8RZ

If you would like to talk to someone not directly involved with the research to raise any concerns, please contact **Kate Hunt**, the Postgraduate Students' Convenor at the Social & Public Health Sciences Unit

Phone: 0141-3573949

E-mail: Kate@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk

Address: MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow. G12 8RZ



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12. Appendices

12.1. Appendix A: Coding sheet for abstracts on gender, work-life balance and health

First author:

Title

Publication date:

Journal:

Country of study:

Work-life balance

Does the abstract summary:

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| a) Mention work-life balance (or similar) in the summary | Yes | No |
| b) What phrase does it use? | | |
| c) Address work-life balance issues? | Yes | No |
| d) Is work-life balance a primary focus of the study? | Yes | No |

Gender

Does the abstract summary:

- | | | |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------|
| a) Show both sexes are included? | Yes (with numbers) | Yes (without numbers) |
| | Only women | Only men |
| | No | |
| b) Mention gender differences and/or similarities? | Yes | No |
| c) Address gender issues? | Yes | No |
| d) Is gender a primary focus of the study? | Yes | No |

Health

Does the abstract summary:

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| a) Mention health? | Yes | No |
| b) What kind of health is mentioned? | | |
| c) Address health issues? | Yes | No |
| d) Is health a primary focus of the study? | Yes | No |

Methods

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------|-------------|
| a) What methods are used in the study? | Quantitative | Qualitative |
| b) If qualitative, what methods? | Semi-structured interviews | |
| | Focus groups | |
| | Participant observation | |
| | Other | |

Setting of study

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Single work-place | Multiple work-places | Type of occupation |
| Family type | Geographical area | Other |
| Is the paper worth reading? | Yes | No |

12.2. Appendix B: Scoping exercise - Economic Development Agencies topic guide

Research objective:

The aim of my research is to investigate the strategies non-professional working parents employ to manage their work-life balance, and how their work-life balance impacts on their health.

Interview aim:

The aim of this interview is:

- To find out the organisation's perceptions of their clients' experiences of work-life balance
- To explore the challenges and benefits these experiences may have brought to their clients
- To further develop ideas for research

Design

This part of my research will involve a number of interviews with Economic Development Agencies around Glasgow that provide employability services and skills training in deprived areas. This will not contribute to my main research data for analysis, but instead will aid me in developing the questions I will ask for my research.

1. Introduction

- Introduction to me and the study
- Explain the aim of this interview in the wider context of my research
- Explain about confidentiality and will be taking notes

2. Background

Brief background information:

- Economic Development Agency
- What services does the organisation provide?
- Who uses the services?
- Rough number of men and women?

3. Work-life balance

- What does the phrase ‘work-life balance’ mean to your clients?

4. Policies

- Do you feel that your clients are aware of work-life balance related legislation?
 - Probe: maternity & paternity leave, carers allowance, etc...

5. Challenges / barriers

- What do you feel are the challenges that work-life balance issues present to your clients?
- What do you feel are the benefits?

6. Interest in study?

- For my main study I will be looking to recruit male and female blue-collar workers of different ages to interview. If I was to recruit from a company, would your organisation be interested in taking part?

7. Anything else?

- Are there any other issues you wish to raise?

Thank you for making the time to meet with me

12.3. Appendix C: Scoping exercise: Economic Development Agencies topic guide

Research objective:

The aim of my research is to investigate the strategies non-professional working parents employ to manage their work-life balance, and how their work-life balance impacts on their health.

Interview aim:

The aim of this interview is:

- To find out the organisation's perceptions of their clients' experiences of work-life balance
- To explore the challenges and benefits these experiences may have brought to their clients
- To further develop ideas for research

Design

This part of my research will involve a number of interviews with Economic Development Agencies around Glasgow that provide employability services and skills training in deprived areas. This will not contribute to my main research data for analysis, but instead will aid me in developing the questions I will ask for my research.

1. Introduction

- Introduction to me and the study
- Explain the aim of this interview in the wider context of my research
- Explain about confidentiality and will be taking notes

2. Background

Brief background information:

- Economic Development Agency
- What services does the organisation provide?
- Who uses the services?
- Rough number of men and women?

3. Work-life balance

- What does the phrase ‘work-life balance’ mean to your clients?

4. Policies

- Do you feel that your clients are aware of work-life balance related legislation?
 - Probe: maternity & paternity leave, carers allowance, etc...

5. Challenges / barriers

- What do you feel are the challenges that work-life balance issues present to your clients?
- What do you feel are the benefits?

6. Interest in study?

- For my main study I will be looking to recruit male and female blue-collar workers of different ages to interview. If I was to recruit from a company, would your organisation be interested in taking part?

7. Anything else?

- Are there any other issues you wish to raise?

Thank you for making the time to meet with me

12.4. Appendix D: Scoping exercise: Trade Unions topic guide

Research objective:

The aim of my research is to investigate the strategies non-professional working parents employ to manage their work-life balance, and how their work-life balance impacts on their health.

Interview aim:

The aim of this interview is:

- To find out the organisation's policies regarding work-life balance
- To find out the organisation's perceptions of their members' experiences of work-life balance
- To explore the challenges and benefits these experiences may have brought to members and their employers
- To further develop ideas for research

Design

This part of my research will involve a number of interviews with Trade Union organisers that represent workers in predominantly blue collar and non-professional occupations. This will not contribute to my main research data for analysis, but instead will aid me in developing the questions I will ask for my research.

1. Introduction

- Introduction to me and the study
- Explain the aim of this interview in the wider context of my research
- Explain about confidentiality and will be taking notes

4. Background

Brief background information:

- Trade Union
- How many members does the Union have?
- What occupations does the Union represent?
- Rough number of men and women?

5. Work-life balance

- What does the phrase ‘work-life balance’ mean to your Union?

4. Policies

- Does your Union have any policies relating to these areas you’ve raised?
 - Probe: maternity & paternity care, flexible working, caring leave, sick leave, career breaks?
- How does the Union communicate these policies to their members?

5. Challenges / barriers

- What do you feel are the challenges these policies present to employers and employees?
- What do you feel are the benefits of these policies?
 - Probe: to organisation, to employees

6. Interest in study?

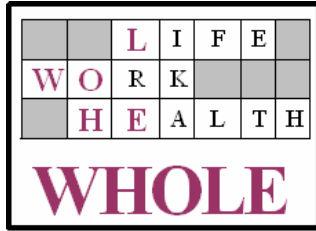
- For my main study I will be looking to recruit male and female blue-collar workers of different ages to interview. If I was to recruit from a company, would your organisation be interested in taking part?

7. Anything else?

- Are there any other issues you wish to raise?

Thank you for making the time to meet with me

12.5. Appendix E: Interview consent form



The **WHOLE** Study: Work, Life & Health Consent form

The purpose of this form is to ensure that your contribution to the above research project is in strict accordance with your wishes.

I have read the information sheet that describes this study, and agree to take part in an individual interview.

I give permission for this interview to be recorded.

I understand that I **do not** need to answer all the questions if I do not wish to and that I may take a break or leave the interview at any time.

I am aware that any information I provide will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Tapes, transcripts and all related documents will be locked away and only available to the research team.

I give permission for brief extracts of what I say to be used for research purposes (including research publications and reports), with strict preservation of anonymity. I understand that the interview will remain confidential and become the property of the MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit.

Signed _____ Date _____

Name (block capitals please) _____

Address _____

12.6. Appendix F: introductory letter to companies



"[Click here and insert recipient's name/address]"

March 2006

Dear "[click here and type the addressee's name]"

Re: Work-life balance and health

I am writing to you to discuss the possibility of conducting an important study within a Glasgow branch of [xxx]. I wish to investigate how employees juggle the demands of work and other aspects of their lives, and how this might impact on their health. Work-life balance is an issue of increasing importance in the UK. As a company that [xxxx], I feel this would be an exciting opportunity.

I am a postgraduate student funded by the UK Medical Research Council, a body funded by but independent of government, which aims to improve human health and quality of life. I am based at the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow. The Unit's mission is to study social and environmental influences on health.

The main focus of the study would be individual meetings with xxx employees about their experiences of balancing work and other areas of life, and their health. I would also like to talk to relevant managers about their experiences of implementing work-life balance related policies within the workplace and the benefits and challenges this may bring. Throughout the study I will endeavour to have as little impact on xxx daily working practices as possible.

Participation of colleagues and managers would be entirely voluntary and completely confidential. My research activities are bound by strict MRC and University of Glasgow ethical guidelines.

I would be happy to produce a summary report of my findings following my fieldwork.

I would very much appreciate it if we could talk over this proposal in more detail. I will phone at the beginning of next week to try to arrange an appointment to discuss the possibility of your organisation taking part. If there is someone else it would be more appropriate for me to contact, either in head office or at a local store, please let me know. I would welcome the opportunity to provide more information either about my proposal or the work of the unit.

Yours sincerely

Ms Sarah Gurney

Postgraduate Student

12.7. Appendix G: Introductory information leaflet



Work, life, and health amongst parents in Scotland: Information for companies

What is this study about?

I would like to talk to mothers and fathers working for [XXX] about their experiences of juggling work and other aspects of their life, and how this impacts on their health.

Why do I want to work with [XXX]?

I would like to work with [XXX] as a company that promotes diversity and flexibility amongst its workforce, and has a number of stores in the Glasgow area.

Whilst there has been a lot of research carried out examining work-life balance and health amongst 'office based' occupations, particularly amongst female employees, there has been relatively little research working with both men and women on the 'shop floor' of the retail sector. Superstores stores such as [XXX] are an important part of the UK economy and people's way of life. I therefore feel that [XXX] would be a really interesting and relevant company to work with.

What will the study involve?

I would like to meet with roughly 40 [XXX] 'shop floor' employees to learn about their experiences of work-life balance and health. This would involve individual discussions lasting approximately 45 minutes. I will ask them a range of questions regarding their experiences of managing their working life in relation to family and other areas of life. The questions will be open-ended and non-judgemental as I am interested in finding out about their individual experiences. Discussions will be recorded in agreement with participants, to ensure I have an accurate record of what is said.

Whilst the focus of the study will be speaking to 'shop floor' employees, I would also like to meet with relevant managers to find out about [XXX's] policies and practices regarding work-life balance and health, and their experiences of implementing these policies.

Throughout the study I will endeavour to have as little impact on [XXX's] daily working practices as possible.

Will the interviews be confidential?

Yes. Short extracts of what is said may be used in academic journals, but I will not use names or any information that might identify individuals. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the tapes and related documents. The Medical Research Council requires us to store all documents securely for ten years, in accordance with the MRC guidelines on good practice.

How will employees be selected to take part in the study?

Ideally I would like to carry out a short (2 page) questionnaire to find out some basic information about your employees. This would include non-intrusive questions regarding their family (number of children, caring responsibilities, etc) and their working patterns (how long they've worked for [XXX], average number of hours worked a week, etc). I will also ask a question about their work-life balance and their health. Using a questionnaire will allow me to gain a better understanding of employees before I meet with them.

Are there any other aspects of the study?

There are a few other things that I would find useful to do, if practical for you, but these are not essential to my study. For example, I would like to see copies of any relevant policies, guidelines and handbooks. If possible I would also be interested in attending any training sessions you may have for new or continuing employees. You may also have suggestions of other activities I may find useful to better understand work-life balance and health within XX.

I am keen to have as little impact on [XXX's] daily working practices as possible, and would therefore like to discuss the best way of carrying out this study with you.

What will the information be used for?

The information collected from my research will be studied and the findings will form the basis of my PhD, published in academic journals and presented to academics and policy makers. I am also happy to produce a summary report of my findings for [XXX] stores.

Will this study cost [XXX] anything?

I will cover all direct costs involved in the study.

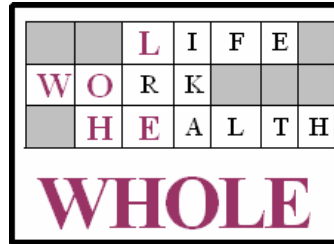
Please contact **Sarah Gurney** if you have any questions about the study, or would like more information.

Direct line: 0141-3577534

E-mail: sarah@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk

Address: MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow. G12 8RZ

12.8. Appendix H: Screening questionnaire



< < IDNO > >

Postal Questionnaire

This questionnaire is strictly **confidential** and will only be seen by researchers working on the WHOLE study. Please see the enclosed leaflet for more details.

Most of these questions ask you to tick a box. A few will ask you to write something down.

At the end there is a form asking if you'd be interested in taking part in an individual interview about the issues covered in the questionnaire. **This is a really important part of the WHOLE study so please do consider taking part.**

Please complete this questionnaire and return it in the pre-paid envelope.



1 **What is your job title?**

2 **Where do you work?**
 (department / unit name)

3 **Are you in:**

please complete one answer only

Band 6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Band 7	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4 **How long have you worked for [ResearchOrg]?** years

Less than a year (tick box)

5 **How many hours a week do you normally work?**

Standard hours: <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	hours
Paid overtime: <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	hours
Extra hours without pay: <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	hours

6 **Do you normally work any hours outside the 'usual' working week?**
 (early mornings before 8am, evenings after 7pm or weekend work)

Please complete one answer only


Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

7 **Thinking about the hours you work, would you prefer to:**

Please complete one answer only

Work <u>fewer</u> hours than you do now	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work <u>more</u> hours than you do now	<input type="checkbox"/>
Carry on working the same number of hours	<input type="checkbox"/>

8 What factors do you consider when looking for a job?

	not important	quite important	important	very important	not applicable
Pay	1	2	3	4	5
Location of workplace	1	2	3	4	5
Holidays	1	2	3	4	5
Interest in job	1	2	3	4	5
Pension	1	2	3	4	5
Career development prospects	1	2	3	4	5
Friendly people	1	2	3	4	5
Job security	1	2	3	4	5
Training opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Flexible working arrangements (e.g. compressed hours, part-time, job share etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Good maternity/paternity leave	1	2	3	4	5
Other (if other, what?) 					

9 Thinking about your current job,

How do you rate...	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very good	not applicable
Pay	1	2	3	4	5
Location of workplace	1	2	3	4	5
Holidays	1	2	3	4	5
Interest in job	1	2	3	4	5
Pension	1	2	3	4	5
Career development prospects	1	2	3	4	5
Friendly people	1	2	3	4	5
Job security	1	2	3	4	5
Training opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Flexible working arrangements (e.g. compressed hours, part-time, job share etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Good maternity/paternity leave	1	2	3	4	5

10 Overall, how satisfied would you say you are with your job?

Please complete one answer only

Very satisfied	1
Satisfied	2
Quite satisfied	3
Not very satisfied	4

11 Are you:

Please complete one answer only

Male	1
Female	2

12 What year were you born?

~~✗~~

--	--	--	--

13 Are you currently living with a spouse or partner?

Please complete one answer only

Yes	1
No	2

14 a Do you have any children living at home with you?
(including biological, step and adopted children)

Please complete one answer only

Yes	1	↓ 14 b & c
No	2	→ 15a

14 b If yes, how many?

~~✗~~

--

 children

14 c If yes, how old are they?

✗ Child 1		years
Child 2		years
Child 3		years
Child 4		years
Child 5		years

15 a Do you look after, or provide any regular care or help for any sick, elderly or disabled adults?

(for example, help with shopping, cleaning or running errands)

Please complete **one** answer only

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	↓ 15 b
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	→ 16

15 b If yes, approximately how many hours a week care do you provide?

<input type="checkbox"/>	hours
--------------------------	-------

16 What is your ethnic group?

Please tick the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background

White	UK	
	Irish	
	Greek	
	Turkish	
	Jewish	
	Kurdish	
	Other	
Mixed	White and Black Caribbean	
	White and Black African	
	White and Asian	
	Any other mixed background	
Asian or Asian British	Indian	
	Pakistani	
	Bangladeshi	
	Chinese	
	Vietnamese	
	Any other Asian background	
Black or Black British	Somali	
	Ugandan	
	Nigerian	
	Ghanaian	
	Other black African background	
	Caribbean	
	Black British	
	Any other black background	
Other ethnic group	Other	

17 To what extent does your family life and family responsibilities interfere with your performance on your job in any of the following ways...

Would you say:-	not at all	to some extent	a great deal	not applicable
Family matters reduce the time you can devote to your job	1	2	3	4
Family worries or problems distract you from your work	1	2	3	4
Family activities stop you getting the amount of sleep you need to do your job well	1	2	3	4
Family obligations reduce the time you need to relax or be by yourself	1	2	3	4

18 To what extent do your job responsibilities interfere with your family life in the following ways...

Would you say:-	not at all	to some extent	a great deal	not applicable
Your job reduces the amount of time you can spend with the family	1	2	3	4
Problems at work make you irritable at home	1	2	3	4
Your work involves a lot of time away from home	1	2	3	4
Your job takes up so much energy you don't feel up to doing things that need attention at home	1	2	3	4

19 To what extent does having both work and family responsibilities...

Would you say:-	not at all	to some extent	a great deal	not applicable
Make you a more rounded person	1	2	3	4
Gives your life more variety	1	2	3	4
Allows you to use all your talents	1	2	3	4
Means you can manage your time better	1	2	3	4
Clarifies your priorities	1	2	3	4

20 Do you have any comments about your 'work life balance'?

In other words, how happy you are with the way you divide your life up between work, family, caring for others, chores and leisure?

~~☒~~....

21 Over the last 12 months would you say that your health on the whole has been:

Please complete one answer only

Excellent	<input type="text"/>	1
Good	<input type="text"/>	2
Fair	<input type="text"/>	3
Poor	<input type="text"/>	4

22 Within the last month have you suffered from problems with...

Please complete one answer on each line only

	Yes	No
Difficulty sleeping	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Nerves	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Always feeling tired	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Difficulty concentrating	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Worrying over every little things	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

23 a Do you have any long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits your daily activities or the work you can do?

Please complete one answer only

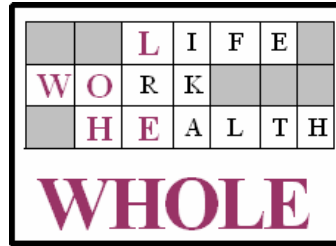
Yes	<input type="text"/>	↓ 23 b
No	<input type="text"/>	

23 b If yes, please give details.



It's almost over... but not yet

Please turn over



In the next few weeks I will be looking for volunteers to talk to in more detail about their experiences of juggling work and other aspects of their life.

This is a really important part of the WHOLE study so please do consider taking part!!

The interviews will last approximately one hour and will take place at a mutually convenient time.

All discussions will be **confidential** and we will not tell [ResearchOrg] what you say at an individual level.

If you'd like to talk to me please fill in your details below.

Completing this form does not commit you to talk to me and you are free to change your mind at any time.

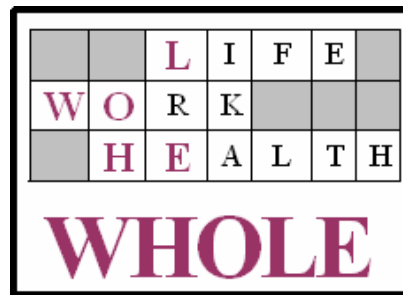
Forename		Surname	
Mobile		Home phone	
Email			
Address			
Town		Postcode	

And that's it.

Please return the questionnaire to us in the pre-paid envelope.

Thank you !

12.9. Appendix I: Screening questionnaire information sheet



I am writing to invite **YOU** to take part in an important study looking at [ResearchOrg administrative, technical and manual] employees' experiences of juggling work, life and health.

I am really keen to hear your views on this important issue!

This leaflet contains some information about the study. Please take a few minutes to read through it and complete the enclosed questionnaire.

Everything you tell me will be kept entirely confidential.



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Who am I?

I am a PhD research student based at the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow. The Unit's mission is to study social and environmental influences on health.

What is this study about?

I am interested in men's and women's experiences of juggling work and other aspects of their life, and how this impacts on their health. I would like to hear from **YOU** about **YOUR** personal experiences, whatever they are.

Why are your views important?

I am sending this questionnaire to [**administrative, technical and manual**] employees within [ResearchOrg] in order to find out about as many people's experiences as possible. Research usually focuses on the experiences of managers, researchers and academics. In this study we want to learn about the experiences of other staff.

Whilst taking part is unlikely to directly benefit you, it is hoped that taking part in this study will help other people in the future. If you are interested in the findings of this study, I can send you a summary once it is completed.

What do you have to do?

If you would like to take part, please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to me in the pre-paid envelope. The questionnaire is short and should take you about 5-10 minutes to complete.

At the back of the questionnaire there is a form asking whether you would like to talk to me in more detail about juggling work and other areas of your life. If you would like to take part please fill in the form and return it to me.

Do you have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to return the questionnaire.

Will the [ResearchOrg] see your questionnaire?

No. [ResearchOrg] will see a summary of the research findings but they will not see any specific information regarding who takes part and what they say. All names and identities of people who return questionnaires will be anonymised.

What will happen if you take part?

If you return the questionnaire, I will look at the information you give me and combine it with the information from other people's questionnaires.

If you complete the form at the back of the questionnaire I may contact you again to invite you to take part in a confidential individual interview about your personal experiences of juggling work and other areas of life. Discussions will last about an hour, and will take place at a mutually convenient time.

What will the information be used for?

This questionnaire is part of my Medical Research Council funded PhD studentship, known as the **WHOLE** study. The information from the questionnaires will be studied and the findings will be used as part of my PhD, published in academic journals and presented to academics and policy makers.

The **WHOLE** study has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Science at the University of Glasgow.

Will the information you provide be kept confidential?

Yes. Neither your name nor any information that may identify you will be used, so that you remain anonymous. Only myself and my two supervisors at the University of Glasgow will have access to the questionnaires and related documents. I am required to store all documents securely for ten years, in accordance with the MRC guidelines on good practice.

Who can you contact if you want more information?

Please contact me if you have any questions about the study, or would like more information.

Direct line: 0141-3577534

E-mail: sarah@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk

Address: MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow. G12 8RZ

If you would like to talk to someone not directly involved with the research to raise any concerns, please contact **Kate Hunt**, the Postgraduate Students' Convenor at the Social & Public Health Sciences Unit

Phone: 0141-3573949

E-mail: Kate@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk

Address: MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow. G12 8RZ



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12.10. Appendix J: Interview topic guide



The WHOLE Study: Interview schedule

Research objectives

To investigate the strategies ‘non-professional’ workers employ to manage their work-life balance, and how their work-life balance impacts on their health.

Notes on the interview schedule

This interview schedule covers a number of themes: work-life, home-life, relaxation / leisure, change, time, health, and the boundaries and overlaps between different areas of life. Some of these themes are covered in specific sections and others throughout the interview.

Whilst the interview schedule contains some very specific questions, the ethos of the interview is to be as open ended and non-leading as possible, whilst focusing on the research objectives. It is likely that participants will touch on some areas when answering other questions. Where possible I will probe in order to gain a better understanding of what exactly individuals mean. In some areas, such as the work section, I use very specific questions in order to understand about specific experiences, opinions etc. In other sections, such as relaxation, I am a lot more general as I anticipate that participants’ experiences will be very varied. In this section I hope to draw more on what the interviewee says and lead the interview from there.

Introduction

- Introduce myself
- Introduce study, who funded by, what the purpose is
- Explain that I'm interested in how 'non-professional' employees juggle work and other aspects of their lives, and how this impacts on their health.
- Explain that it's **their** experiences and opinions I'm after – there are no right or wrong answers.
- Explain confidentiality, tape recording, they don't have to answer all questions and that they can take a break or stop the interview at any time.
- Ask if any questions
- Consent form

Work

- Tell me about yourself
- Tell me about your work. What do you do on a day-to-day basis?
- Are there times that are busier or quieter than others?
- Has the job changed over time?
- What happens if you're off from work?
- Have you ever taken time off for a non-work emergency? Can you give me an example? What happened at work?
- Do you think you'll stay in your job for the foreseeable future?
- Do you think your work affects your health, positively or negatively?

Home

- Can you tell me what you do when you get home from work? And at the weekends?
- Who does what around the house?
- Has there been any changes in the home?²⁹
- Do you think anything at home affects your health, positively or negatively?

Relaxation

- What do you do to relax?
- Is there anything that you'd like to do that you don't? Why?

Work-life balance

- If you hear the phrase 'work-life balance' what does it make you think about? What does that mean for you? How's your work-life balance?
- Is there anything else you'd like to say

²⁹ NB: this question was usually covered in other areas

12.11. Appendix K: Interview summary grid

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

Name of respondent: _____

Job title: _____

Grade: _____

Their work

Hours worked per week: _____

How long worked for company: _____

Children**Partner: Yes / No**

	age
Child 1	
Child 2	
Child 3	

Other caring responsibilities: Yes / No

Number of hours a week	
------------------------	--

Health over the last 12 months:

Excellent	
Good	
Fair	
Poor	

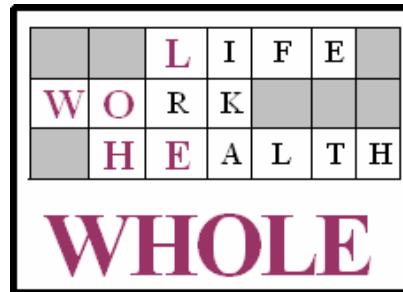
Health within the last month:

Difficulty sleeping	
Nerves	
Always feeling tired	
Difficulty concentrating	
Worrying over every little things	

Disability: Yes / No

Details:

12.12. Appendix L: Interview information leaflet



The WHOLE Study:

Information Sheet

This leaflet contains some information about the study. Please take a few minutes to read through it before beginning the interview.

Everything you tell me will be treated with the strictest of confidence.



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What is this study about?

I am interested in men's and women's experiences of juggling work and other aspects of their life, and how this impacts on their health. I would like to hear from **YOU** about **YOUR** personal experiences, whatever they are.

Why are your views important?

I will be holding a small number of individual confidential interviews with men and women working in [administrative, technical and manual jobs] within [ResearchOrg] so I can hear as many different people's experiences as possible. Research usually focuses on the experiences of managers, researchers and academics. In this study we want to learn about the experiences of other staff.

Whilst taking part is unlikely to directly benefit you, it is hoped that taking part in this study will help other people in the future. If you are interested in the findings of this study, I can send you a summary once it is completed.

What do you have to do?

The interview will take roughly an hour and will take part during work or at a mutually convenient time.

I will be recording the interview to make sure I have an accurate record of what is said. At the beginning of the session I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you agree to take part and be recorded.

Do you have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.

What will the information be used for?

This interview is part of my Medical Research Council funded PhD studentship, known as the **WHOLE** study. The information from the interviews will be studied and the findings will be used as part of my PhD, published in academic journals and presented to academics and policy makers.

The **WHOLE** study has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Science at the University of Glasgow.

Will the information you provide be kept confidential?

Yes. Neither your name nor any information that may identify you will be used, so that you remain anonymous. Only myself and my two supervisors at the University of Glasgow will have access to the tapes, questionnaires and related documents. I am required to store all documents securely for ten years, in accordance with the MRC guidelines on good practice.

Will [ResearchOrg] know what is said?

No. [ResearchOrg] will see a summary of the research findings but they will not see any specific information regarding who takes part and what they say. All names and identities of people who take part will be anonymised.

Who can you contact if you want more information?

Please contact **Sarah Gurney** if you have any questions about the study, or would like more information.

Direct line: 0141-3577534

E-mail: sarah@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk

Address: MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow. G12 8RZ

If you would like to talk to someone not directly involved with the research to raise any concerns, please contact **Kate Hunt**, the Postgraduate Students' Convenor at the Social & Public Health Sciences Unit

Phone: 0141-3573949

E-mail: Kate@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk

Address: MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, 4 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow. G12 8RZ



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