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3 **The career decisions of professional women with dependent children. What's changed?**
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7 **Abstract**
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11 *Purpose:* The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to investigate anticipated and real
12 career decisions made by two cohorts of professional women in the U.K. at differing stages of the
13 lifespan.
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16 *Design/methodology/approach:* Career decisions made by two cohorts of professional women
17 following the birth of their first child at different stages of the lifespan and satisfaction with these
18 choices in retrospect were investigated. Data analysis followed a thematic approach and
19 comparisons between the two cohorts were made.
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21 *Findings:* The study revealed much similarity between the two cohorts. The decisions women make
22 regarding whether to return to work or not and the extent to which they are satisfied with their
23 working arrangements are constrained by similar individual and organisational factors despite the
24 15-20 year gap.
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27 *Research Implications:* Although mothers in the U.K. now experience strengthened legislation
28 concerning maternity benefits and entitlements and there have been advances in flexible working,
29 progress in relation to supporting women reconcile work and home life when they return to work is
30 arguably limited.
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32 *Originality/value:* This paper offers insights into the extent to which the career decisions made by
33 professional women following the birth of their first child and satisfaction with these choices in
34 retrospect have changed (or not) among two cohorts of professional women (15-20 years apart).
35 The findings stress the importance of understanding the complex issues faced by mothers in the
36 workforce and providing appropriate organisational support.
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39 *Keywords:* Women professionals, mothers, career decisions, career development.
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41 *Paper:* Research Paper
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Introduction

In the UK today there are more women with dependent children in the workforce than ever before (Office for National Statistics, 2013). This increase is due to changes in societal attitudes, legislation and family-friendly policies that have positively impacted on the ability of many women to enter into and remain in the workforce. Research has shown that professional women in the UK (that is, those who have acquired professional knowledge through high levels of experience and/or extensive study), are likely to return to work after having children, and recent figures suggest that approximately nine in ten professionals or associate professionals and over eight in ten managers returned to paid work after childbirth (Chanfreau et al., 2011). It is important to note, however, that over a third of women in the UK do not return to work after the birth of their first child (Kanji, 2011). This may be a decision women make before leaving work for maternity leave or a mother who previously intended to return to work may decide to remain at home following the birth of her child. Popular media in the UK and USA have highlighted the 'opt out' trend where well-educated, married professional women choose to leave their careers either temporarily or permanently to become full-time mothers (Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2011; Lovejoy and Stone, 2012). Furthermore, women who do return to work do not necessarily do so in a full-time, continuous capacity (Kanji, 2011).

The decisions professional women make once having children has received academic attention and the extent to which a woman's decision to remain in, or exit the workforce is a subjective choice or a consequence of anticipated 'push and pull factors', including, for example, tensions reconciling the demands of work and family, is the subject of academic discourse (Kumra, 2010; Carlson et al., 2011; Greenhaus and Powell, 2012). What is neglected is an exploration of the extent to which these 'push and pull factors' have changed (or not) over time. As such, this article presents results from an exploratory comparative qualitative study to investigate career decisions and satisfaction with career decisions made among two cohorts of professional women with dependent children at different stages of the lifespan (15-20 years apart).

Background

In the UK, women are now entitled to strengthened legislation concerning maternity benefits and entitlements and there is welcome emerging recognition of the role of fathers in the form of paternity rights. Research highlights that mothers take an average of 39 weeks maternity leave, whilst 71 per cent of men take two weeks paternity leave or less (Chanfreau et al., 2011) and since April 2015 the Shared Parental Leave bill has come into force which enables eligible mothers, fathers, partners and adopters to choose how to share time off work after their child is born or placed for adoption. This is specifically designed to give parents more flexibility in how to share the

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3 care of their child in the first year following birth or adoption (Gov.uk, 2015). Furthermore, under
4 the Equality Act introduced in 2010 in the UK (Gov.uk, 2010), guidance is provided for flexible
5 working rights for parents who want to adapt their working pattern due to childcare responsibilities.
6 Flexible working may take the form of changes to the hours worked, changes to the times when
7 those hours are worked (for example, term-time only working), and/or an ability to work from
8 home. Research has however reported the implicit and explicit prejudice experienced by many
9 women (and men) who take advantage of family-friendly work initiatives (Davidson and Burke, 2011;
10 Greenhaus, Ziegert and Allen, 2012). Often, engaging in such initiatives is regarded by managers and
11 fellow colleagues as a lack of commitment to work (Brown, 2010; Hilbrecht et. al., 2008).

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18 According to Hakim's (1996) preference theory, women differ in their attachment to work.
19 These differences influence the decision about whether to return to work or not and if so, in what
20 capacity. Prior to having children, women generally work full-time and this reflects their work-
21 centred attitudes and behaviour (ibid.). Upon having children, however, Hakim (1996) argues their
22 priorities change resulting in either a reduction in hours at work or exiting the workforce altogether,
23 thereby reflecting a lack of commitment to paid work and a career. Subsequent research has
24 contested Hakim's work, highlighting the myriad factors that may need to be taken into
25 consideration when deciding whether or not to return to work and indeed the capacity in which to
26 return (Broadbridge, 2010; Houston and Marks, 2003; Kumra, 2010). Houston and Marks's (2003)
27 longitudinal study of 349 first-time mothers, for example, revealed that almost a quarter of the
28 women in their sample were unable to return to work as they had originally planned during their
29 pregnancy, providing support for the idea that career decisions made are likely to be a combination
30 of preference and circumstance. While fatherhood appears to increase men's status at work,
31 motherhood is associated with being a less committed employee resulting in reduced organisational
32 status and accompanying penalties (Hodges and Budig, 2010; Theunissen et. al., 2011).

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43 A considerable number of mothers who return to work in the UK change their working
44 pattern from full-time to part-time employment. The Office for National Statistics (2012) shows that
45 in the second quarter of 2011, 37 per cent of mothers with dependent children were working part-
46 time (compared to 6 per cent of fathers). Although in recent times fathers have requested flexible
47 working patterns to fulfil their childcare responsibilities, part-time workers are still predominantly
48 women. Working part-time may be perceived as a realistic solution for women (and men) who wish
49 to remain in the workforce but combine this with caring for children. Literature has however
50 revealed that part-time posts tend to result in a downgrading of the role (Houston and Marks, 2003;
51 Grant, Yeandle and Buckner, 2006). Consequently, women may find themselves unable to utilize the
52 full range of skills and talents they possess and often report feeling side-lined and under-valued at
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3 work (Cahusac and Kanji, 2014; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2015). Female part-time
4 workers have also been shown to experience disadvantage in terms of lack of access to training and
5 development, lack of access to organisational networks, being less likely to gain promotions, and less
6 likely to be provided with opportunities to supervise others (Davidson and Burke, 2011).
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8 Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of provision for part-time workers at senior organizational levels
9 which means that women are often forced to act in lower-level roles because of the lack of part-time
10 leadership roles (Tomlinson, 2006; Warren, 2010).
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15 The transition back to work after having children can be a challenging time for women
16 (Millward, 2006; Cabrera, 2009; Carlson et al., 2011). Certainly, it is well documented that, frustrated
17 by lack of career opportunity and the demands of balancing work and home, women leave the
18 workplace to start their own business (Hewlett and Luce, 2005; Hunt and Fielden, 2006). It is
19 important to note that whilst literature has highlighted these issues faced by mothers in the
20 workforce, these tensions can occur among women at different life stages with or without children,
21 thereby reflecting the dominant masculine organisational culture of the workplace (Anderson and
22 Vinnicombe, 2015; Wilhoit, 2014). Research has highlighted that this dominant masculine
23 organisational culture presents working mothers in particular with a 'take it or leave it' scenario by
24 encouraging mothers to accept lower status work or and/or downplay their identity as mothers or
25 leave work (Cahusac and Kanji, 2014). In summary, the academic literature and popular discourse
26 highlights that, although mothers now enjoy strengthened legislation concerning maternity benefits
27 and entitlements, progress in relation to supporting mothers in reconciling work and home life when
28 they return to paid work is somewhat limited.
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38 **Methodology**

39 This study emanated from an interest in the complex issues facing working mothers following the
40 experiences of the authors as working mothers themselves. Specifically, the study addressed a gap in
41 academic literature identified by the authors, that is to investigate comparisons between two
42 cohorts of professional women with children at different stages of the lifespan. Professional women
43 were defined as those who have acquired professional knowledge through high levels of experience
44 and/or extensive study (Chanfreau et. al., 2011). Cohort 1 consisted of 15 women whose first child
45 was born between 2011 and 2006: essentially these were women whose first child was five years old
46 or younger (pre-school age in the UK). Cohort 2 consisted of 15 women whose first child was born
47 between 1990 and 1995: for these women, their first child was approximately 18 years old and
48 therefore either nearing, or at the age when he or she would no longer be considered a 'dependent
49 child' in the UK. These two time periods were selected to compare the pressing issues currently
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3 faced by mothers of pre-school children returning to work (or not) with the experiences of women
4 who had experienced the twists and turns of a career (or not) whilst raising children but who were
5 now without dependent children at home, or on the cusp of their future without a 'dependent' child
6 in the household and thus in a position to reflect on their decisions. The research compared the two
7 cohorts to identify the extent to which the experiences of women have changed (or not) in the past
8 15–20 years.
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12 Consistent with previous empirical work, the study addressed the relationship between
13 intention and subsequent behaviour (Houston and Marks, 2003). The study also examined the
14 factors that influenced these career decisions and how women felt about the career decisions they
15 had made in retrospect. Mothers were identified through snowball sampling (Symon and Cassell,
16 2012) and data were collated through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Specifically, factors
17 influencing career decisions and satisfaction with the career decisions made in retrospect were
18 addressed at two stages: (1) during late pregnancy with first child and (2) when returning to work (or
19 not). Potential problems with memory recall and post-hoc rationalisation can accompany the
20 generation of retrospective data, particularly for cohort 2 and as such, the authors utilised gentle
21 probes to encourage respondents to further explore relevant issues and elaborate on experiences
22 which led to key decisions (Newton, Torges and Stewart, 2012; Symon and Cassell, 2012). Data
23 analysis followed a thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Each interview was analysed to
24 identify themes and subsequently coded. Additionally the authors worked across interviews to
25 further develop analysis.
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36 Demographic data (see tables 1 and 2) revealed that the average age of women in cohort 1
37 when they had their first child was 32 and the average age of women in cohort 2 was 30. Before
38 falling pregnant with their first child, all women in both cohorts were working full-time.
39 Furthermore, at this time all women in both cohorts were married or living with their partners and
40 all husbands or partners were earning a comparable or higher salary. No restriction was placed on
41 area or type of professional role to elicit the experiences of women within an array of professions.
42 Women in both cohorts were comparable in terms of professional status and employed in areas of
43 work including financial services, teaching, medicine, human resources, retail and project
44 management. The following discussion presents an overview of the main themes emanating from
45 the data in relation to the stages addressed in the interviews.
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During Late Pregnancy

Thematic analysis of the interview materials revealed that during late pregnancy, all but one of the women in cohort 1 (women whose first child was born between 2011 and 2006) planned to return to work after the birth of their first child. Women in cohort 1 expected to return to work and articulated that their spouse or partner also expected them to return. Women in cohort 1 reported that during late pregnancy they planned to return to work within the same organization on a part-time basis to combine motherhood with paid work. No women in this cohort expressed a desire to return to full-time employment. Generally, women in cohort 1 were satisfied with their anticipated arrangements at this time. One respondent explained:

‘I thought I’d go back to work part-time. I didn’t question that... I mean I never considered any other options’ (Lucy, age 34, cohort 1).

‘I definitely didn’t want to go back to work full time. I planned to go back part-time which seemed to me at the time to be a good option’ (Lucy, 34, cohort 1).

Analysis revealed however, that a few women in cohort 1 were already aware at this stage that they would either have to leave their organisation or return to work at a lower grade to facilitate part-time work:

‘I knew I couldn’t come back to the same role on a three-day basis so I’d have to be demoted. I wanted to work three days a week but I knew that wasn’t possible as someone else at work had requested it and they’d said no. If you’re not there for 4 days a week or more then they say you can’t do my role’ (Emily, 36, cohort 1).

Women in cohort 1 revealed that at this stage perceived financial pressure was the main factor influencing their anticipated decision to return to work. Whilst the financial rewards of working appeared paramount, it became clear through the interviews that the sense of personal fulfilment and self-identity derived from their working life also influenced their career decisions at this time. The following quotes highlight these factors:

‘Financially it would have been difficult for me to stop working altogether. I think we would have struggled if I’d decided not to work’ (Grace, age 35, cohort 1).

‘I always enjoyed work and I just couldn’t imagine staying at home with a child for five days, it’s just not what I wanted to do’ (Sarah, age 35, cohort 1).

Similarly to cohort 1, most women from cohort 2 (women whose first child was born between 1990 and 1995) also planned to return to work after the birth of their first child. Again,

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3 many women in cohort 2 anticipated that they would return to work within the same organization
4 and it was interesting to note that in contrast to cohort 1, several women in cohort 2 stated that
5 they planned to return to work full-time. Analysis of the interview data revealed a difference in the
6 main factor influencing the decision to return to work. Women in cohort 2 were more likely to
7 disclose concerns relating to the detrimental impact time away from work would have on their
8 careers. One respondent commented:
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13 'My expectation was that I would return to work. I had worked so hard at my career. It
14 would have been difficult to keep my career at that level and take time off. I was the only
15 woman at that time who had a child' (Mary, 55, cohort 2).
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19 Some women in cohort 2 expressed a desire whilst in the late stages of pregnancy to exit the
20 workforce when their child was born. These women either commented on a lack of financial
21 pressure and therefore more freedom to decide whether to return to work or not, or acknowledged
22 that they were unable to combine both motherhood and work in their preferred capacity and
23 suggested that:
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28 'We were in a position that we could manage without my income. I had an image of a stay at
29 home mum, I wanted to look after my daughter, I thought I would find it difficult to leave my
30 baby with someone else' (Jenny, 52, cohort 2).
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33 'I couldn't do the work I was doing on a part time basis, I wanted to have children and spend
34 time with them so I stopped work' (Amy, 56, cohort 2).
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39 **Returning to work after the birth of the first child (or not)**

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41 The vast majority of women in cohort 1 disclosed that they had taken between nine and 12 months
42 maternity leave and then returned to work within the same organization, in the same role, on a part-
43 time basis after having their first child. This is consistent with the anticipated arrangements that
44 women in cohort 1 outlined in stage 1: during late pregnancy. One respondent stated:
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49 'I went back to work three days a week when (*child*) was 9 months (Julie, 35, cohort 1).
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51 Again, women in cohort 1 generally highlighted financial pressures and the personal fulfilment and
52 self-identity that work afforded them as the main factors influencing their career decisions. The
53 following quotes reflect these findings:
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57 'We can't afford for me not to work. I think when you're used to having money you don't
58 realize the impact of not having money' (Suzanne, 31, cohort 1).
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3 'I enjoy work. I went back for some adult conversation!' (Maddy, 32, cohort 1).
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5 Several women, however, commented that they decided not to return to work. One respondent
6 commented that this is not what she had previously planned and that after she had her child she;
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9 'just couldn't bear to leave her' (Olivia, 36, cohort 1).
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11 Two women highlighted that they were unable to return to work on a part-time basis as previously
12 planned and therefore felt they had no choice but to leave work. One responded commented:
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15 'If I could have gone back to work part-time then I would have looked into that but it was
16 clear that my employers weren't enthusiastic about it. It's very male dominated in my area,
17 they didn't understand how it would work. I knew it would be a nightmare so I left' (Jo, 35,
18 cohort 1).
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22 The extent to which women in cohort 1 were able to manage their work and family demands
23 appeared to influence whether they were satisfied with the career decisions they had made. Women
24 in cohort 1 outlined numerous key organizational and personal factors influencing whether or not
25 they felt they could combine their professional lives with caring for their child or children. These
26 included: flexible working, a supportive boss and colleagues, an involved and 'hands on' partner and
27 satisfaction with the childcare they had in place either in the form of family support and/or private
28 nursery. There was a definite sense of frustration expressed by women in cohort 1 who had returned
29 to work on a part-time basis as a result of a difference between the rhetoric and reality of working
30 part-time. Two respondents suggested that:
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37 'I think working part-time you get the worst of both worlds. The organization demands more
38 of you than you can do in the hours you're supposed to work and children demand more
39 from you than you have the time or energy to give' (Grace, 35, cohort 1).
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43 'I went back to work part-time but I work more hours than I'm contracted to do. It's just the
44 way it is, often I can't get everything done so I have to catch up in the evenings or on
45 weekends. It's not great' (Lucy, 34, cohort 1).
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49 Analysis of interview materials revealed that the majority of women in cohort 2 had taken
50 between three and six months maternity leave and then returned to work as planned after their
51 child was born. Similarly to women in cohort 1, women in cohort 2 returned to work but in a much
52 shorter period of time. Again, women in cohort 2 highlighted the same organizational and personal
53 factors as women in cohort 1 influencing the extent to which they could make their professional
54 lives work. As with cohort 1, a few women in cohort 2 decided not to return to work. Women in
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3 cohort 2 reported that difficulties arose over a period of time once they returned to work and for
4 these women managing work and family demands proved problematic, as outlined in the following
5 quotes:
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8 ‘My full-time job didn’t fit with regular childcare. Nurseries closed at 6 pm and I couldn’t
9 always make it back for then. I had to reduce my hours, which meant changing the nature of
10 my job. There was a sense of having taken a step backwards’ (Mandy, age 49, cohort 2),
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14 Interestingly, all but one woman in cohort 2 went on to have subsequent children. Just over
15 half of women in cohort 2 had two children in total and the other half ultimately went on to have
16 three children. Analysis of the data materials for cohort 2 revealed the impact of the second child on
17 career decisions. Within two years of the birth of the second child almost all respondents in cohort 2
18 had reduced their working hours further or had withdrawn from the workforce entirely.
19 Respondents offered a variety of reasons for this, including difficulties managing childcare for two
20 children and the cost implications of childcare for more than one child that made work prohibitive,
21 highlighted by the following respondent:
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24 ‘I just about coped with one child but when my second child came along it became
25 impossible to maintain the same hours. It was just too complicated to organize childcare and
26 work those hours in that role with two children’ (Janet, 52, cohort 2).
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30 Many of these women ultimately returned to the workforce after, on average, a seven-year break but
31 they generally returned to lower status, less demanding roles than those they were performing prior
32 to having children. There was a clear sense among cohort 2 that exiting the workforce had impacted
33 on careers. Some women were accepting of this; others expressed dissatisfaction and commented
34 that careers ultimately *‘fizzled out.’* These issues were not reported by cohort 1 but may be
35 encountered in future by working mothers in cohort one who go on to have more children.
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38 39 40 41 42 43 **Conclusion**

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45 The study revealed some interesting results. Consistent with previous research, most women in
46 cohort 1 planned to return to work on a part-time basis after their first child was born (Houston and
47 Marks, 2003; Grant et al., 2006). Although the financial implications of not working were frequently
48 mentioned, thematic analysis of the interview materials revealed that work was about much more
49 than this for many women. Interestingly, women in cohort 1 appeared to express a presumption
50 that they would return to work after having children which is arguably a positive finding, suggesting
51 that changing societal expectations, improvements in legislation and advances in flexible working
52 mean that professional women expect to return to work (Chanfreau et al., 2011).
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3 Again, women in cohort 2 generally considered that they would return to work after their first child
4 was born. Most women in cohort 2 reported that they planned to return to work on a part-time
5 basis but some intended to return full-time and a few planned to leave work after their child was
6 born. Women in this cohort reported concerns relating to the detrimental impact taking time away
7 from work would have on their careers, that if they stepped out of their profession they would be
8 unable to return. Again, this was not the only factor influencing their decision to return to work.
9 Women in cohort 2 also discussed the sense of personal fulfilment and self-identity work afforded
10 them. For women in cohort 2 there was much more variability around the decision to return to work
11 or not, which may be indicative of less protective legislation and limited opportunities for flexible
12 working at the time but may also reflect their exploration of alternative options. These findings do
13 not resonate with Hakim's (1996) work suggesting that women lack commitment to paid work and a
14 career once they have children. Rather, these results support the argument that a range of factors
15 influence a mother's decision to return to work or not and in what capacity and that ultimately
16 career decisions are likely to be a combination of preference and circumstance (Broadbridge, 2010;
17 Houston and Marks, 2003; Kumra, 2010).
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28 A further revealing finding suggested that a shift in career decision-making came within a
29 few years of a subsequent child being born. Within two years of a second child being born all but
30 one of the women in cohort 2 had further reduced their working hours or withdrawn from the
31 workforce entirely. Many women in cohort 2 then returned to the workforce an average of seven
32 years later but to lower-status and less challenging roles than those they had been performing
33 before having children, leaving them disheartened with their careers. This not reported by women in
34 cohort 1, as generally these women had not experienced a return to paid work with more than one
35 child. This change in occupational status for cohort 2 compared to cohort 1 is captured in Figure 1.
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Insert figure 1 about here

48 This is an important finding in relation to the impact of multiple children on managing work
49 and family life and consequently, it is likely that both personal and organizational factors need to be
50 further understood to support and retain professional women with any number of children but
51 particularly multiple children. For example, although flexible working was theoretically available for
52 many husbands and partners, particularly in cohort 1, it was exclusively mothers as opposed to
53 fathers who made the necessary adjustments to their working patterns once their child was born.
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3 Future research is required to address the extent to which the women in cohort 1 who return to
4 work with subsequent children face increasing conflict in managing work and home life.
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7 Both cohorts outlined limitations associated with part-time working. Women from both
8 cohorts commented on the lower status of part-time work and difficulties managing to complete
9 professional roles within part-time hours and this is consistent with previous research (EHRC, 2015;
10 Gatrell, 2007; Las Heras and Hall, 2007). The similarity between the cohorts is an interesting finding
11 and suggests that despite increased availability and acceptability of professional women returning to
12 work part-time, such women still face penalties for doing so. Further work is needed to redress the
13 status of part-time work and for many professional roles there appears to be a need to develop an
14 increased understanding of what constitutes part-time work (Warren, 2010).
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20 Additionally, both cohorts outlined similar key organizational and personal factors
21 influencing the extent to which they were satisfied with the career decisions they made. These
22 included: flexible working; a supportive boss and colleagues, an involved partner and satisfaction
23 with the childcare they had in place (reflected in figure 2).
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30 *Insert figure 2 about here*
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34 Again this similarity is an interesting finding. Over time, women in cohort 2 frequently felt
35 forced to make career adjustments because of dissatisfaction with one or more of these factors,
36 often precipitated by returning to work after having multiple children, thereby causing a mismatch
37 between what they would have liked to have achieved in their careers and the reality of their
38 situation. Consequently, for women in cohort 2 their careers often slowed down or even stagnated.
39 It is yet to be determined whether or not women in cohort 1 will encounter the same barriers.
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45 In conclusion, the study revealed similarity between the two cohorts despite the 15–20 year
46 gap. Ultimately women in cohort 1 who decided to return to work appeared to be facing many of the
47 same issues reconciling work and home life as their counterparts in cohort 2, despite the 15–20 year
48 gap. Although mothers now experience strengthened legislation concerning maternity benefits and
49 entitlements and there have been advances in flexible working, progress in relation to supporting
50 women reconcile work and home life when they return to work is somewhat limited. Women may
51 be more inclined to return to work after having children but the extent to which they feel supported
52 and valued once they return is questionable. By side-lining women to lower status roles or leaving
53 them with what they consider to be little choice but to exit the workforce altogether, women's
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3 inferior status at work will continue to be perpetuated. Further work is required to understand the
4 complex issues faced by working mothers over time.
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For Peer Review

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Table 1 – Key demographic data – Cohort 1 (2006-2011)

Profession	Age	Marital Status	Age when 1 st child was born	Length of MAT leave	Capacity in which returned to work (or not)	Current number of children
Teacher	35	Married	31	12 months	Part time	2
Executive (PR)	34	Married	31	9 months	Part time	2
Management Consultant	36	Living with partner	33	10 months	Part time	1
Executive (retail)	40	Married	38	Did not intend to return	Did not return	2
Executive (financial services)	35	Married	31	10 months	Did not return	2
Lecturer	36	Married	32	9 months	Part time	2
Project Manager in banking	36	Married	34	12 months	Part time	1
Healthcare Professional	35	Married	33	9 months	Part time	1
Legal Services Professional	36	Married	32	9 months	Part time	1
Pharmacologist	36	Married	33	12 months	Part time	1
Account Manager	31	Married	29	12 months	Part time	1
Recruitment Consultant	36	Married	27	12 months	Did not return	2
Teacher	35	Living with partner	32	12 months	Part time	1
Civil Servant	35	Married	32	9 months	Part time	1
Lecturer	34	Married	30	12 months	Part time	1

Table 2 – Key demographic data – Cohort 2 (1990-1995)

Profession	Age	Marital Status	Age when 1 st child was born	Length of MAT leave	Capacity in which returned to work (or not)	Current number of children
Team Co-ordinator	54	Married	32	6 months	Part time	3
Healthcare Professional	48	Married	25	4 months	Part time	2
Teacher	49	Married	28	Did not intend to return	Did not return	3
Solicitor	55	Married	37	Did not intend to return	Did not return	2
Civil Servant	49	Married	29	Did not intend to return	Full time	3
Claims Inspector	55	Married	34	6 months	Part time	2
Librarian	46	Married	26	6 months	Part time	3
HR Manager	47	Married	29	6 months	Part time	2
Radio Producer	48	Married	28	Did not intend to return	Did not return	3
Lecturer	51	Married	32	4 months	Part time	2
GP	52	Married	32	3 months	Part time	3
Sales and Marketing Manager	55	Married	36	3 months	Full time	2
Account Manager	49	Married	29	6 months	Part time	2
Sales Manager	45	Married	27	Did not intend to return	Did not return	3
Bio – Chemist, Water company	55	Married	35	4 months	Full time	1

Figure 1 – Current employment status for Cohort 1 compared to cohort 2

Cohort 1 (2006 – 2011)	Cohort 2 (1990 – 1995)
<p>Women working in their original profession/role since the birth of their first child (part-time):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher • Executive (PR) • Management Consultant • Lecturer • Project Manager in banking • Healthcare Professional • Legal Services Professional • Account Manager • Civil Servant • Lecturer 	<p>Women working in their original profession/role since the birth of their first child (full time and part-time):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare professional • GP (Clinical Manager) • HR manager • Librarian • Lecturer • Teacher
<p>Women working in a different profession/role since the birth of their first child (part-time):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project support • Teaching assistant • Child-minder 	<p>Women working in a different profession/role since the birth of their first child (full time and part-time):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relate mediator • Teaching Assistant • Counsellor • Ward Clerk • Proof Reader • Counsellor • Teacher • Teaching Assistant • Child-minder
<p>Women not in paid employment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full time mother • Full time mother 	<p>Women not in paid employment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A

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Figure 2 - Key organizational and personal factors influencing satisfaction with career decisions (cohorts 1 and 2).

Cohort 1 (2006 – 2011)	Cohort 2 (1990 – 1995)
<p>Key organisational factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible working • Supportive boss and colleagues • Personal fulfilment at work • Ability to meet the demands of the role within the agreed working arrangements (i.e. match between the rhetoric and reality of part-time work) 	<p>Key organisational factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible working • Supportive boss and colleagues • Personal fulfilment at work • Ability to meet the demands of the role within the agreed working arrangements (i.e. match between the rhetoric and reality of part-time work)
<p>Key personal factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Husband/partner involvement/support • Family involvement/support • Childcare arrangements 	<p>Key personal factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Husband/partner involvement/support • Family involvement/support • Childcare arrangements