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**CAREER BREAK OR BROKEN CAREER? MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES OF
RETURNING TO PAID WORK.**

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
AT
SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL WORK
MASSEY UNIVERSITY
PALMERSTON NORTH, NEW ZEALAND

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2007

ABSTRACT

Servicemen returning from two World Wars were granted assistance in finding work, retraining and other benefits in recognition of the sacrifices they had made. Yet mothers' returning to work after time out bearing and raising children are reliant on a booming economy to obtain even limited entry to the labour market, and the work obtained is very often inferior to the jobs held by women before becoming mothers.

Currently due to lower fertility rates and the ageing populations of the world's richer nations, a shortage of working-age people is predicted to continue into at least the middle of the twenty-first century. To overcome this shortfall, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) advises its member states to assist mothers to return to paid work sooner. Most OECD nations are complying, with varying degrees of success. Some policy frameworks make this goal more easily attainable than others.

Mothers in liberal welfare states often return to paid work later than they might otherwise prefer. Many returners are overqualified for the work they are doing. While there appears to be relatively few barriers to re-entry, the choice of re-entry occupations are limited and returners are predominantly offered low status jobs with no career opportunities at the back of the job queue and gender queue. Mothers who interrupt their careers by taking a career break for childbearing and rearing generally face downward occupational mobility and loss of lifetime incomes.

This thesis assesses the experiences of mothers who return to employment in one liberal nation, New Zealand. It applies Esping-Andersen's three models of welfare states and Reskin and Roos' gender queues model to the situation of returners. The study investigates the precise nature of the obstacles and processes encountered by a number of mothers attempting to resume a career. It argues that social policies matter: returners in countries where state intervention is more widespread and where there is universal, extensive and generous social provision and support for working mothers are economically better off.

The research methods include in-depth interviews and a focus group with mothers, a mail questionnaire and interviews with employers, and a study of recent and current New Zealand and overseas government policies to assist working parents. The findings of this thesis are that regardless of skill levels, New Zealand returners are consigned to low status occupations where they are not fully integrated into the 'normal' full-time workforce with career opportunities. These mothers generally suffer more than one episode of returning to the back of the queue. They also earn less (weekly and annually) than mothers who do not take career breaks. The study identifies social policy frameworks and employers' policies and practices as factors contributing to the processes whereby returners are relegated to the back of the queue. Although New Zealand has recently brought in policies to assist mothers to return to paid work these initiatives have not addressed the processes that currently confine returners in low status, part-time employment. Policies similar to those created to specifically target the needs of ex-servicemen would go a long way toward assisting mothers to access higher status and better-paid jobs at the head of the queue. The thesis concludes with policy recommendations to facilitate mothers' integration into such jobs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been a totally engrossing and stimulating project for me. Many people have walked with me on this long journey and I wish to acknowledge and thank their valued support and assistance along the way.

Firstly, I want to thank my chief supervisor, Dr. Celia Briar, for her quality supervision, constant encouragement and friendship. Without her I would not have had the confidence to embark on the project. Thank you also to Dr. Lesley Patterson who agreed to be my second supervisor half way through the project. I should also like to acknowledge and thank the contribution of my initial second supervisor, Dr. Jocelyn Quinnell, who unfortunately had to discontinue her involvement in the project due to ill health.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank the Massey University Advanced Degree Award Committee for awarding me a grant to relieve me of my teaching duties for a semester so I could complete my data analysis and write my first draft of the thesis. Without it I would not have been able to complete the project.

Last but most certainly not least, I want to acknowledge and thank my children Siok Khim, Beng Kian, Suu Min and Chieh Ling for having faith in me and for constantly telling me that I 'will get there'. In particular, I wish to thank Suu Min for the numerous cups of tea and occasional cards and lots of hugs as she cheered me on. And to my youngest daughter, Chieh Ling for her patience and constant back rubs and hugs as well as cups of tea. You have all made this a much lighter task than it could have been.

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PREFACE

This thesis grew out of a personal quest to understand the experiences of returners. Prior to even conceiving any idea of doing a PhD degree I became a sole mother and income earner for four children aged one to eleven. There began for me a series of casual and part-time, temporary paid jobs. My hours and locations of work depended on the availability of low cost childcare provided by neighbours and friends, often at times dictated by their own personal circumstances.

In one of many workplaces, I came across a group of mothers in a similar situation to me. Together we would discuss our circumstances, marvel at the remarkably untouched lifestyles of our former husbands, and lament the lack of insight that had landed us in the precarious position that we found ourselves in. Although we held tertiary degrees and had been in paid work before having children, our occupational status was often no different from that of new entrants to the labour market. Indeed, we not only had to start over at entry (or near entry) level jobs, but we also had to compete for such jobs with younger and newly qualified candidates, often losing out to the latter. My discussion with partnered mothers found that their experiences of returning to work were similarly constrained by childcare, since husbands in full-time work were generally unavailable to help.

While some management experts such as Charles Handy (1994 and 2001) praise the personal and social benefits of a flexible, mobile and contingent 'career', our experiences suggested otherwise. We did not choose part-time jobs as a lifestyle preference. On the contrary, we were often faced with a choice between unemployment and part-time or casual employment, often at lower pay and status than standard full-time jobs. Our low pay meant that saving for periods of unemployment was an impossible goal. The periods of unemployment and the time prior to the termination of an employment contract were high stress points, so that when negotiating or renegotiating employment contracts, we felt powerless to demand better pay or conditions.

My interest in mothers who withdraw from paid work to care for children, thereby becoming partially dependent on their breadwinner husbands, was tinged with concern about the lack of information on the consequences of taking such an action. As a younger mother I had written a self-help book about morning sickness when I suffered from it. I thought I could do similar research on returners' experiences to provide information for mothers who for various reasons were returning to paid work. The idea gradually became the seeding ground for the research that is presented in this thesis.

SECTION ONE: CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to understand the experiences of a group of mothers returning to paid work in one liberal nation, New Zealand. It examines the processes that lead to the relegation of returners to low status occupations at the back of the job queue. The current shortages of labour in most industrialised countries have led the OECD to pressure member states to provide more policy support for mothers to return to paid work. It could be argued that this would increase returners' bargaining power, so that they could be expected to return to jobs with career opportunities further up the job queue. However, both New Zealand and overseas research suggests that mothers are still returning to low status jobs with no career opportunities. This thesis explores the factors contributing to the persistent labour market inequities between mothers and workers without childcare responsibilities.

Returners and returned servicemen

Society needs babies or we have no future, and so far, only women can bear those babies. But that biological fact-of-life shouldn't be used as a weapon against women; shouldn't be used as an excuse for not giving them jobs, not promoting them, not taking them seriously in spheres outside the home. I think we should begin to think about having babies as a kind of National Service...think of the analogy of war-time service. Then we had no great conceptual or practical difficulty in safeguarding the jobs and positions of men who were fighting overseas. When they came back we retrained them, counted their war service for promotion purposes, gave them cheap loans for housing, settled them on the land. The men who fought overseas were not to be disadvantaged vis-à-vis men who didn't, and I would argue that those who bear babies shouldn't be disadvantaged over those who don't. No man has ever had to make a decision between having a family and having a job. They can have both. I would argue that women should be able to have both too if they want to, and society should work out ways to make that possible.

(Tizard, 1986, pp. 96-97)

The position of mothers returning to paid work is comparable with that of servicemen returning to paid work. Both servicemen and mothers have taken time out of their paid work or training, may as a result have outdated skills, and are potentially disadvantaged compared with men and women whose careers have not been interrupted (Ang & Briar, 2002). While it is sometimes argued that women 'choose' to have children, the analogy is nevertheless apt. So far only women can have children. Further, marriage and children affect mothers' careers more than fathers'

(Bielby & Bielby, 1989, pp. 776-786; Conley, 2005, pp. 25-28; Maher, Denver, Curtin & Singleton, 2004; Moore, 2004, p. 208; Perna, 2005, pp. 13-19; Wilkie, 1988). The gendered nature of childcare means that for many women, the decision to have children and to care for these children is not so much a choice as a 'socially sanctioned obligation' (Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds & Aldred, 2003, pp. 310-327; Folbre, 1994). In New Zealand as in other western, liberal nations labour market and social policies regard mothers as the primary childcare providers, making fathers less visible as childcare givers (Baxter, 1998; Crompton, 2006, pp. 254-268; Else, 1997; Fagan & Rubery, 1999; Lewis, 2000).

When servicemen returned from World War One and World War Two, efforts were made to ensure they were not disadvantaged by the sacrifices they had made. Policy makers took care not to offend ex-service personnel or damage their careers compared with workers who had not taken time out from their careers (Thomson, 1983, p. 9). They were keen to make returning soldiers feel they had a vital place in the post war world (Ward, 1944). The Rehabilitation Board was given the role of overcoming any disadvantage to ex-servicemen in the civilian world by giving them "the best the country could afford" (Thomson, 1983, pp. 45-53). Long service employees, however, could not be replaced in order to reinstate a returned serviceman. If the old job were no longer available, they would be reinstated in the "most favourable alternative job practicable" (Ward, 1944, p. 9).

However, in the late 1990s when I first became interested in the issues facing mothers returning to paid work, there was no explicit government policy towards partnered returners unless they were the wives of unemployed men. There were no formal barriers against mothers returning to paid work, but neither was there any significant government assistance. As they were not (and are not) eligible for unemployment benefit, partnered returners usually did not register for work with the government agency, Work and Income New Zealand. They generally did not receive assistance toward training or work-related childcare when seeking work. For mothers of employed partners, there was apparently 'free choice' over whether to go out to work or not. By contrast, there were increasingly strong policy pressures in the 1990s to move solo mothers (and the wives of unemployed men) back into paid work, in

practice often into dead end jobs and working poverty (Baker, & Tippin, 1999; Duncan, 2004, pp.181-202).

This thesis supports Tizard's argument that both servicemen and mothers perform important services for the nation. Both have made sacrifices and in doing so stand to lose careers. If we regard gender equity as important, then the same kinds of policies would be put in place to make sure mothers who took career breaks to bear and rear children were not made worse off than people who did not make this 'sacrifice'. As the quote above suggests, having and rearing babies should be seen as a national service. However, motherhood is not valued in the way that war work appears to be (Waring, 1988, p. 135), as reflected in the current lowly labour market position of returners (Crompton, 2006; OECD, 2002, 2003 and 2004).

The costs of taking career breaks, in terms of loss of career and income, have contributed to more mothers delaying childbirth or remaining childless (Gustafsson & Stafford, 1997, p 152-153; Lonsdale, 1992, p. 96; Newman & White, 2006, pp. 221-223; Perrons, 2003, p. 134). With the looming 50-year labour shortages, labour market and social policies will have to make better use of returners as a source of untapped resources (OECD, 2004, pp. 11-53; Statistics New Zealand, 2005; Tomlinson, 2004a, pp. 6-11; Tomlinson, Olsen, Neff, Purdam, & Mehta, 2005). In New Zealand, for example, it has been estimated that making use of the skilled labour of mothers could increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 0.4 percent per year. Over a 50-year period, this is estimated to increase New Zealand's GDP by 15-20 percent (OECD, 2004, pp. 193- 194).

Labour shortages, ageing population and fertility rates

Current labour market forecasts predict a long-term labour shortage linked to lower fertility rates, delayed childbearing, increasing childlessness and ageing populations (Dharmalingan, Pool & Johnstone, 1996, pp. 133-139; del Boca & Pasqua, 2005, p. 125; J. Franklin & Tueno, 2004, p. 2; Irwin & Bottero, 2000, p. 262; McGregor, Pajo & Dewe, 1999, pp. 1-9; Morehead, 2005, p. 4). Student loans, rising house prices and forgone earnings all contribute to lowered fertility rates and increased childlessness, as women who had planned to have children delay doing so, often until it is too late (Franklin & Tueno, 2004, pp. 3-11; OECD, 2002, 2003, and 2004). This is projected

to continue until at least 2050, especially in European Union (EU) countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, and Italy, and in some Asian countries such as Japan (Karoly & Panis, 2004, p. 34). In response, the OECD is urging member nations to create policies to increase mothers' participation in paid work so as to address labour market shortages.

The OECD recommends that mothers' labour power be utilised without it leading to further falls in fertility (MacInnes, 2005, pp. 274-275; OECD, 2002, 2003, 2004). In New Zealand, as in most OECD liberal welfare nations, since the end of the 1990s, there have been significant policy changes towards mothers' employment. In the context of a long-term labour shortage, there are increasingly explicit labour market policies recognising the need for returners' labour power, and offering childcare assistance and financial incentives to partnered mothers to go out to work. For lone mothers, there is a continuation, although less explicit, of the 'welfare-to-work' policies of the 1990s (Baker, 2001; Bradford, 2006; Duncan, 2004; Patterson & McIvor, 2005; Rudd, 1993).

For partnered mothers, the Working for Families package has increased provision for childcare assistance, and income transfers in the form of tax credits, for low-to-middle income families (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). Further, for both lone and partnered mothers, Paid Parental Leave has been extended to 14 weeks and to cover the self-employed, though this is still low by international standards. Nevertheless, it is an improvement from the 1980s, when the Maternity Leave and Employment Act provided mothers with the right to only six months of unpaid leave, later extended to a total of 12 months, with an additional 14 weeks of unpaid maternity leave and a two-week unpaid paternity leave (Gauthier, 1998, p. 176).

New Zealand is also moving towards an appearance of greater integration of paid work and family life. Certainly, the challenges of combining paid work and family are currently receiving greater attention. A work-life committee, jointly administered and run by the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women (NACEW) and the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust (EEO Trust), has been working on creating work-life balance strategies for all employees, not just those with parenting responsibilities in the workplace (OECD, 2004, pp. 181-187). The Green Party's

Flexible Hours Bill (similar to current legislation in the UK), for example, aims to increase flexibility for parents and other employees to balance paid and unpaid work. However, there are concerns that such a Bill might marginalize mothers in part-time employment further, by encouraging part-time working by mothers, but not fathers (CTU submission on the Employment Relations Amendment Bill, 2005).

Aims and scope of the study

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions: What do a group of New Zealand returners identify as barriers to resuming a career? What processes contribute to these returners' location at the back of the job queue? What more could government and employer policies do to assist mothers who take career breaks for children to return to good jobs at the head of the queue?

The project has gathered information from returners about their experiences of attempting to resume a career. The research then aims to identify the factors and processes that lead to the marginalization of returners in low status occupations. It explores national policy frameworks and examines employers' beliefs, assumptions, attitudes and practices as factors that mediate mothers' employment. The thesis applies Esping-Andersen's models of welfare capitalism (adapted to the situation of returners) and Reskin and Roos' job and gender queues to investigate and understand the market position of returners. The thesis argues that the Government, as the only institution that has the resources and overall accountability to ensure greater equality in society (Carnoy, 2001, p. 322), has a significant role to play in providing the social infrastructure such as childcare and paid leave, as well as in regulating the labour market.

However, national policy frameworks provide different levels of support to returners, mediating their employment outcomes. 'Conservative' models of welfare have traditionally discouraged mothers' paid employment. In conservative nations such as Germany and the Netherlands, for example, state policies support a breadwinner family model and mothers predominantly return to part-time employment. Conservative regimes now struggle to significantly increase female labour force participation rates. By contrast, 'social democratic' models provide generous assistance to employed parents and have the highest proportion of mothers in the paid

labour force. Returners in social democratic nations, such as Sweden, Finland and Denmark, are better off economically than returners in either liberal or conservative nations (Fagan & Rubbery, 1999; Gustafsson, 1994; Gustafsson, Kenjoh, & Wetzels, 2002).

In between is the 'liberal' welfare model, where the timing of mothers' return to paid work is understood as a lifestyle choice. Liberal nations provide relatively little assistance towards the costs of children, and only weak legal protection against employer discrimination on the grounds of gender, parenthood and age. In liberal nations such as New Zealand, the USA and the UK, low social provision contributes to the clustering of returners in low status occupations (Gutierrez-Domenech, & Bell, 2004; Mason, 2000). In most liberal nations there is more market freedom and fewer sanctions against employers' policies and practices that disadvantage returners (Gregory, 2003; Williams, 2000). This thesis examines the precise nature of the barriers and processes that lead to returners' lowly labour market position. It argues that the relegation of mothers to the back of the job queue can be mediated by policy intervention.

Returners' low pay limits their ability to achieve economic independence, plan for the future, save to buy a house or for retirement. It also increases the risks of poverty in old age and contributes to returners' lack of bargaining power at home and in the work place. This thesis suggests that without policy intervention, the relegation of returners to the back of the queue potentially undermines New Zealand's ability to achieve International Labour Organisations (ILO) millennium goals of eradicating poverty and empowering women, especially mothers, by 2015 (OECD, 2004). However, the projected 50-year labour shortage may to a degree improve returners' bargaining power, and this may prove to be the key to bringing about genuine policy change.

The sample of mothers in this study does not include sole mothers on a state benefit. There is already a considerable literature on the topic of sole mothers who have returned to paid work (see, for example, Baker, 2001; Baker & Tippin, 1999; Kilkey, 2000; McIvor, 2004). It focuses instead on a number of partnered and sole mothers who are returning or have already returned to work.

Contribution of this study

The study for this thesis adapted the job queues/ gender queues model (Reskin & Roos, 1990) to the labour market position of returners. Although the concept was developed to explain women's inroads into male-dominated work and the subsequent feminisation of these occupations, this study found the model especially useful to illustrate the processes whereby mothers returning to paid work are relegated to the back of the queue through employers' policies and practices. To my knowledge this is the first time that the model has been used to explain returners' employment position. The model provides a conceptual framework that shows clearly and simply that (New Zealand) mothers returning to paid work are a least-preferred occupational group, who occupy the back of the queue in terms of good working conditions and pay. This will add to the literature on the job queues/gender queues model.

The comparison of the treatment of returners in different welfare states finds that in social democratic nations, as in most industrialised nations generally, state support for mothers is more extensive and generous than in liberal nations such as New Zealand. Returners in social democratic nations, in particular, are more likely to return to good jobs and to be able to move from part-time to full-time employment when the children are older. So secondly, my contribution is to show that relegating returners to the back of the queue is an issue that can be mediated by policy intervention.

This study will also contribute to the information gap on partnered returners in New Zealand. The information will assist policy makers to create more effective strategies to halt the occupational downgrading of mothers returning to paid work. By taking account of the processes by which returners are confined to low paid jobs, policy makers are better able to create return-to-work packages specifically targeted at returning mothers to career type jobs rather than 'just a job'.

Summary of research findings

The study found that the mothers who participated in this study could return to paid work relatively easily, a reflection of the current job market. Nevertheless, the jobs they were offered were predominantly of lower status than ones they held before taking child-related career breaks. Contrary to choice/preference theory, the mothers

in this study were significantly constrained by labour market conditions. Most of the mothers in this study were obliged to accept part-time and temporary or casual jobs at the back of the job queue.

Apart from childcare constraints, this study identified other financial factors that made returning less than straightforward. Employers' expectation that returners would pay for their own retraining added to the costs of returning and contributed to many mothers delaying re-entry. Further, the mothers also identified additional costs such as the cost of acquiring a paid work-appropriate wardrobe, printing of curricula vitae, and postage, as well as costs of transport to job interviews or training venues. While these costs might not seem significant, for mothers with no income, such costs were additional outlays that they simply could not afford.

The employers surveyed for this study appeared to have preconceived ideas about the needs and potentials of returners, contributing to workplace practices that disadvantaged returners. Many employers, for instance, believed that returners wanted or needed part-time, flexible work. Further, while some employers saw returners as possessing work-related skills and competences, many others appeared to suggest that mothers who took employment breaks lost work-related skills needed for career type jobs. The employers' response to these constraints was to provide flexible but low status jobs at the back of the queue for returners; these jobs often lacked career opportunities. Most of the mothers who participated in the study had not been able to move from part-time and temporary positions to full-time and permanent positions even a decade after returning.

Apart from three mothers who were on a state benefit before returning to work, the mothers in this study did not receive state assistance in returning to paid work. The three participants who were able to make use of state funded training initiatives, such as the Training Incentive Allowance, were more upwardly mobile, illustrating the significance of state assistance for returners' employment. Currently, while the Working for Families package has increased financial support to low-to-middle income families where the parents are in paid work, there is no provision toward retraining and other job-search costs for partnered and sole returners who are not on a state benefit. This suggests that current social provision to assist state beneficiaries to

return to employment should be expanded and extended to partnered and sole mothers who are seeking to rejoin the paid work force.

Thesis terms

Some terms used in the thesis have been standardised. The meanings I attached to them are explained below.

Returns: In this thesis I use the term 'returners' to refer to mothers who have taken extended career breaks to look after children, as well as those who are returning to paid work after a short time out while on maternity or parental leave. I use the term returners interchangeably with mothers because the literature talks about motherhood penalties. The 1980s literature on returners predominantly used this term to refer to mothers who have taken extended breaks of more than five years before re-entering the paid workforce. However, these days mothers who take maternity or parental leave are also referred to as returners (Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005; Morehead, 2005; Tomlinson, Olsen, Neff, Purdam & Mehta, 2005; Yeandle, 2001).

Some mothers 'choose' to do part-time work because of the difficulty of working full-time when children are small, and because of the generally high costs of childcare, but they do not 'choose' to lose their careers. The costs of taking child-related career breaks are high partly because of the lack of proper support for mothers, and partly because of the way part-time employment has been constructed (Boswell & Jenkins, 1994; Briar, 1992; Reskin & Padavic, 1999; Votinius, 2006; Dex & Josh, 1999). While mothers who have taken extended breaks may face additional barriers, all mothers who have taken time out of the paid work force typically return to different labour market conditions from the ones that they left. In this sense, all mothers risk discrimination related to employers' perceptions and beliefs about their paid work commitments and productivity.

Career break: While career breaks can refer to time taken out of paid work for various purposes, I use career break to refer exclusively to the time that mothers take out of the paid workforce in order to care for children. The literature refers to motherhood costs associated with taking time out for children. By contrast,

individuals taking career breaks for other purposes, such as further training often return to jobs with better career opportunities.

Downward occupational mobility: In this thesis mothers' loss of career following a child-related career break is referred to as downward occupational mobility or occupational downgrading: mothers return to jobs that are of lower status than the ones they held before having children. This is different from being placed in the worst jobs at the back of the queue: while a buoyant market and increasing social provision may improve mothers' employment opportunities, without stronger state legislation, employers are likely to still prefer fathers and to place mothers at the back of the job queue.

Support for mothers: I use this term to refer to state funded assistance to reduce the costs of returning to paid work. Such assistance includes state subsidised childcare and childcare facilities, child-related tax credits and allowances, as well as paid and unpaid parental leave. Unlike ex-servicemen in the two World Wars who retained their right to be reinstated in their old jobs, the mothers in this study did not receive such support. Further, in most liberal nations, social support for mothers is low and this limits mothers' employment opportunities.

Employment: I use employment to refer to paid work, as opposed to unpaid, typically care work in the home. I use paid work and employment interchangeably. If "work" is used only to mean paid employment, this implies that women raising children and doing household labour are enjoying leisure.

Career/career type jobs: In this thesis I use career and career type jobs to refer to full-time (permanent) work or part-time work with similar conditions to full-time employment: regular hours, fringe benefits, and an adequate income, sufficient to guarantee economic independence and opportunities for promotions. In particular, career type jobs are associated with opportunities for advancement of at least one or two steps. Seen from this perspective, mothers' return to paid work is often into employment but not necessarily in jobs that offer a return to pre-childbirth career trajectories. While not all returners may want to return to a career, it is very likely that they do all want to return to jobs that offer career-type opportunities including good

pay and conditions (opportunities for better hours, pay and advancement). This would contribute to a more realistic 'choice' for returners.

Ideal worker/ideal mother: In this thesis, mothers' career breaks to look after children and other domestic tasks are seen as contributing to fathers' relative freedom to pursue work that demands total commitment and long hours (Williams, 2000, p. 20). The notion of an 'ideal' paid worker and an 'ideal' caregiver contributes to workplace practices that disadvantage mothers (Williams, 2000, p. 3). Returners, as part-time workers, are valued less than full-time workers (Crompton, 2006, p. 266; Delphy, 1984, pp. 57-76; Hartmann, 1981).

Non-standard/precarious employment: In this thesis I use non-standard or precarious employment or work to refer to mothers' part-time, casual and temporary employment, in contrast to a supposed market, standard, full-time and careered employment. Full-time employees are expected to commit long hours to paid work, while part-time employees are assumed to have other calls on their time. Although employed students and semi-retired older workers in short hours employment, as well as (predominantly) men working more than a 50-hour week, are seen as 'non-standard' workers, the great majority of 'non-standard' female employees are mothers who work fewer than the normal full-time hours. Male workers, especially fathers, are more likely to be seen as normal or standard workers with careers, whereas mothers are more likely to be seen as 'abnormal', non-standard or deviant workers. In recent decades in the English speaking nations, 'standard work' hours have become longer.

(Male) breadwinner model: In this thesis the term refers to the lingering effects of the idea that a family typically consists of a male breadwinner and a female caregiver; employers' perceptions that mothers do not or should not need to go out to work, except perhaps for a 'little job', contribute to the relegation of mothers to the back of the queue. The breadwinner model of the family assigns mothers the primary responsibility for childcare and fathers the primary responsibility for paid work (Baker, 2001, p. 56; Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 63-66; Gavron, 1966; Harris, 1980, pp. 407-408; Oakley, 1974; Scott & Tilly, 1980, p. 130; Secombe, 1993, pp. 13-35; Speakman & Marchington, 1999; Waring, 1988).

This thesis notes that the model of the single breadwinner household has in fact not reflected the material reality of most families for several decades, largely due to declining real wages (Baker, 2001). Even during the first half of the twentieth century when it was most common, it applied primarily to middle-class families (Lewis, 2001). Nevertheless, the term is still used despite the trend for there to be increasingly more dual- or one-and-a-half earner households in most industrialised nations (Callister, 2005; Lewis, 2002, pp. 51-56; Shirley, Koopman-Boyden, Pool & St, John, 1997).

The family wage: In this thesis, I note the nineteenth century idea of a man's earnings as being able to support a man, his wife and several children (Baker, 2001, p. 66; Land, 1980; Nolan, 2000; Scott & Tilly, 1980, p. 130; Walby, 1990, p. 37). However, this thesis takes account of the fact that falling male wages and an increasing reliance on mothers' earnings have made both the breadwinner model and the family wage less relevant in today's households (Baker, 2001, pp. 65-66; Else, 1996, pp. 51-56; Lewis, 2001).

Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into three main sections. Section One comprises Chapters One to Four. It provides the context and background to the research. Section Two comprises Chapters Five to Nine. Chapter Five provides an outline of and rationale for the research design and methods. Chapters Six to Nine report and analyse the empirical data from a focus group of mothers and in-depth interviews with mothers, as well as in-depth interviews with six employers, and a mail survey of employers. Section Three, comprising Chapters Ten to Eleven, discusses the findings and concludes the thesis with some recommendations to improve returners' employment opportunities.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on the impact of social policies on returners' employment. It outlines and adapts Esping-Andersen's three models of welfare capitalism (1990) to the position of returners, highlighting the significance of social policies for mothers returning to paid work. This chapter argues that social policies can and do make a difference to mothers' employment opportunities. It suggests that social policies such as those available in social democratic nations provide the highest

support for mothers to return to career jobs, enabling mothers to combine motherhood and careers more effectively.

Chapter Three outlines the patterns of returners' employment. It describes the increase in mothers' employment in New Zealand and internationally, noting also mothers' shorter breaks and increasing continuity in employment. The chapter further reviews the literature on mothers returning to paid work and provides a context with which findings from this study can be compared.

Chapter Four provides a theoretical perspective of returners in paid work. It examines the literature on models conceptualising women's employment, and adapts Reskin and Roos' job queues/gender queues model to the situation of returners in paid work. The chapter then outlines some theoretical explanations on mothers' employment, asking who benefits from the marginalization of returners at the back of the queue. This chapter suggests that different groups, including husbands/partners, employers and state representatives, benefit from the lowly position of returners in the labour market. Chapters One to Four set the context in which the research findings will be analysed and discussed.

Section Two comprises the next four chapters. Chapter Five outlines the rationale for the research design and describes the methods used in the study. This chapter provides a brief description of the participants of the study, and outlines the study's analytical approach. The chapter notes the influence of feminist literature on the research, and ends with a reflection on the effects of the study on the participants and on the researcher.

In Chapters Six to Eight I report and analyse mothers' experiences of returning to paid work. Chapter Six investigates mothers' re-entry approaches and reports on the costs to these mothers of taking (extended) career breaks for children. The mothers were predominantly offered part-time low status jobs at the back of the queue, and this contributed to their reduced earnings capacity. Chapter Seven explores the processes leading to mothers' lowly market position. The chapter identifies employers' beliefs, assumptions and practices as factors that contribute to the relegation of mothers to the least desirable jobs at the back of the queue. Chapter Eight investigates and reports on

returners' precarious paid work conditions. It discusses the barriers that make it difficult for mothers to move from part-time and casual/temporary positions to permanent and full-time employment.

Chapter Nine explores employers' attitudes and use of returners' skills and experiences/qualifications. It highlights employers' perceptions of work-life balance strategies, such as paid and unpaid parental leave, flexible work options and returners' suitability for career type jobs. The chapter identifies employers' hiring and recruitment strategies as key factors that contribute to returners' lowly labour market position.

In Section Three, the empirical data is integrated with the literature reviewed in Section One. Chapter Ten discusses the discrepancies between mothers' accounts and employers' claims. It explores the barriers preventing mothers from achieving equity in the labour market and sets the stage for the recommendations to overcome such barriers in Chapter Eleven.

The final chapter, Chapter Eleven, summarises the research findings, and explores the opportunities for change: the current skills shortage and increasingly strong job market provides policy makers with a unique opportunity to make better use of returners' skills. The chapter concludes the thesis by addressing the research questions set out in the first part of the thesis. It recommends stronger legislation and protection of returners in part-time and other precarious employment. It also suggests direct state assistance towards re-entry costs.

CHAPTER TWO: RETURNERS AND SOCIAL POLICY

Introduction

This chapter explores the effects of social policies as a key factor influencing returners' labour market position. It argues that social policies have a crucial impact on returners' employment opportunities.

The chapter begins by investigating the importance of social policy for returners. It then discusses the main features of liberal, conservative, and social democratic regimes, using a modified version of the typologies used by Esping-Andersen (1990) that I adapt to the situation of returners. This is followed by a brief overview of social provision available to mothers to combine childcare and paid work in different welfare states. It then explores the concept of labour market inequities in terms of national and international policy frameworks.

The importance of social policy for returners

National policy frameworks provide different types and levels of assistance to mothers returning to paid work. It makes a huge difference to returners which country they live in. 'Personal' decisions about how many children to have and when to return to paid work are very much shaped by state policies, enabling or limiting the careers of single women, wives and mothers.

However, state policies have both assisted and hindered returners' employment opportunities. State policies have sometimes created barriers to returners' work aspirations, and reinforced the economic dependence of mothers (Briar, 1992b; Briar, 1997, pp. 166- 174; Castles, 1996, p. 102; Cockburn, 1983, pp. 116-203; Else, 1992, pp. 239-140; Koopman-Boyden & Scott, 1984, p. 20; Walby, 1990; Williams, 2000; Sainsbury, 1996, pp. 55-63; Sawer, 2003, pp. 86-186; Walby, 1990, pp. 39-59; Peck, 1996, pp. 72-74). Nevertheless, without state intervention, mothers find it harder to combine paid work and motherhood and are more likely to cluster in low status jobs (Hogue & Kirkpatrick, 2003, pp. 684-685; Levenson, 2000, pp. 336-359).

State regulations to reduce discrimination against part-timers, as in the EU for instance, provide better protection for returners (Briar & O'Brien, 2003, pp. 194-208;

Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 86-87; Hogue & Kirkpatrick, 2003, p. 685; Pasqua, 2005, pp. 202-204). Where there is state regulation to ensure employers provide pathways to enable returners to move from part-time to full-time employment, returners are more likely to be fully integrated into the 'normal' workforce and to have continuity of employment (Crompton, Dennett & Wigfield, 2003, pp. 6-19; Tomlinson, 2006a). In countries where state intervention is high, as in Scandinavia, returners have better protection and mothers generally return to decent jobs with good pay and career prospects. However, in countries where state regulations are frowned on, as in the USA, mothers, especially those with no or low qualifications, often return to low paid and low status employment (Bittman, 1999, p. 29; Crompton, 2006b, pp. 118-120). In addition, in countries where the working week is better regulated, as in France (shorter full-time hours), mothers' employment can mirror that of childfree individuals more closely.

Government policies towards returners can be implicit and so invisible at times. For example, a policy of not funding childcare is a policy of limiting maternal employment. However, these policies are also dynamic, shifting and varying over time and within nations. In most industrialised nations, married mothers with young dependent children have been discouraged from returning to paid work at times when there were no labour shortages (Briar, 1997; Else, 1996, pp. 54-55; Nolan, 2000, pp. 198-199). Sometimes state policies have mirrored the level of public disapproval of working wives and mothers (Nolan, 2000, Herd, 2005, pp. 32-51; Myrdal & Klein, 1956).

Policy fluctuations within nations over time

Within nations, policies towards returners have changed enormously within single generations at times, from prohibitions on the employment of married women (Western Germany), to the conscription of mothers with older children into paid work in World War Two (Briar, 1997; Nolan, 2000). In the two World Wars and at various times of labour shortages after the Second World War, policy makers have responded by creating short-term strategies such as increased childcare provisions and flexible work to enable mothers to return to higher grades occupations (typically in male-dominated industries). Before World War I, in both New Zealand and the UK, widows with children were given an allowance to stay home (Briar, 1997; Nolan,

2000). Then during World War I, women with or without children were encouraged into the full range of 'men's jobs' and described as 'heroines' by politicians. In 1918, at the end of the war, however, women were accused of 'stealing' men's jobs if they did not instantly 'retire' (Braybon, 1981; Nolan, 2000; Sainsbury, 1996, p. 103; Walby, 1986, pp. 100-201).

In the Second World War, state policies in the UK used similar manipulations to recruit women into war work. This time mothers of children under 14 years were not conscripted but other women (nurses and midwives up to age 60, for instance) were. Mothers of dependent children were pressured to 'volunteer' and childcare facilities were provided to encourage mothers' paid work participation. This was withdrawn in 1945 when there was no longer the need to recruit and retain mothers' labour (Briar, 1997). In New Zealand, similar tactics were used, though not to the same extent as in the UK (Nolan, 2000).

In the late twentieth century, there were smaller but still significant shifts in policies towards the employment of returners, and these are still occurring. There were smaller recruitment drives in post-war Britain to attract married women, including mothers, back into the paid workforce on a temporary basis to meet specific labour shortages, in textiles (in the 1950s) and teaching (in the 1960s) (Briar, 1997). A similar situation arose during the 1990s on a wider scale, when in response to a fall in the supply of labour from school leavers, the UK government persuaded suitably qualified mothers of very young children to return sooner to paid work (Brannen & Moss, 1991; Briar, 1994, p. 26).

In New Zealand, after the Second World War and into the early 1960s, the Government funded retraining courses as a way to entice mothers, especially those who had trained as teachers or nurses, to return to paid work (Nolan, 2000, pp. 219-229). Before then married women were mostly not in formal paid employment (Herd, 2005; McPherson, 2005, p. 16). In both countries, the overall policy drive appeared to be one of manipulating the level of support available for mothers to combine paid work and childcare. In all of these instances, the government backed the recruitment drive by encouraging targeted provision of additional nursery places for the children of these mothers (Briar, 1997; Nolan, 2000).

It would seem, then, that when mothers' labour has been needed, state policies have been created to make it possible for mothers to combine paid work and childcare (Norton, 1996, pp. 4-11). However, mothers are recruited mostly into low status employment and there has been a strong resistance to giving mothers a permanent foothold in the paid work force. Nevertheless, in the context of the long-term projected labour market shortages today, it is more difficult for policy makers to continue to under-value returners' contribution since returners currently form a large untapped resource (OECD, 2004; Tomlinson, Olsen, Neff, Purdam & Mehta, 2005). As indicated in the previous chapter, most national policies in OECD countries are responding with increased support to return mothers to paid work (Conway & McLoughlin, 2002, pp. 6-17; Hawksley, 1995, pp. 62-62).

Different types of policy framework have markedly different effects upon returners' ability to obtain a well-paid job or re-enter a career. In the next section I look at three types of welfare regime using a modified version of Esping-Andersen's typology, to show their effects upon returners' employment opportunities.

Varieties of welfare capitalism

Esping-Andersen (1990) identified three categories of welfare state regimes under capitalism, which he labelled predominantly liberal, corporatist and social democratic. He acknowledged that these are 'ideal types' and that nations do not conform in all respects to the categories he gave them. Many feminists have critiqued Esping-Anderson's typologies as applying mainly to a male work force. In this thesis I have made some modifications, to more accurately reflect the position of mothers returning to paid employment under different welfare regimes. In looking at state policies towards returners, by and large I adhere to Esping-Anderson's conceptualisation of liberal regimes.

Firstly, liberal welfare regimes, including the USA, the UK and New Zealand, support individual freedom, the primacy of the market and limited social rights (Crompton, 2006b, pp. 208-211; Pierson, 1991, p. 186). Welfare provisions in liberal welfare nations are stringent and income transfers are often means-tested, with targeted benefits that cater to those most in need of assistance (Castles, 1996; Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 26).

Conservative or corporatist regimes, including the former West Germany, Ireland and Switzerland, focus less on individual freedom, support more state influence and provide more generous welfare support. However, the conservative policy framework (especially in the former West Germany) is also more supportive of a traditional gender division of labour with men as primary breadwinners and women as primary care givers, making it harder for partnered mothers to participate fully in paid work (Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 44-45; Ostner, 2002, pp. 154-156).

Finally, social democratic regimes, in particular the Nordic states of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland, support more individual freedom and less market freedom, while also providing the most extensive and generous support to mothers (Pierson, 1991, p. 187). France provides an interesting case, in that its social provision for mothers is as generous as those of the social democratic regimes, but according to Esping-Andersen's model, it is classified as corporatist.

These 'ideal' welfare models have been strongly criticised by feminist writers as being gender-blind (Borchorst, 1994, pp. 26-44; Bryson, Bittman & Donath, 1994, pp. 118-131; Dahlerup, 1992; Daly, 1994; Daly & Rake, 2003; De Bruin, 1993; Evertsson, 2000, pp. 230-239; Jenson, 2004, p. 174; Land & Lewis, 1998, pp. 51-54; Lewis, 1992; Myles, 1996; Orloff, 1993, pp. 307-315; Pierson, 1991, pp. 70-79; Sainsbury, 1994, pp. 150-169; Sassoon, 1992, pp. 172-173; Sawyer, 1993, p. 10). In particular, they have objected to the notion of 'decommodification', where welfare provisions in each regime determine the ability of its citizens to maintain a livelihood without reliance on the labour market (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 22).

Feminist writers argue that women are not 'commodified', in that their incomes are also largely derived from non-market sources such as the male breadwinner or the state (Daly, 1994, p. 108; Daly & Lewis, 2000, pp. 288-291; Else, 1997; Hernes, 1992). They note that state policies are gendered and potentially reinforce gender inequality (Orloff, 1993, p. 316; Pierson, 1991, pp. 69-70). They note, for instance, that low-level state provision of welfare would merely transfer dependency from a male breadwinner to the state and do not lead to true emancipation (Borchorst, 1994; Borchorst & Siim, 1992, p. 146; Daly, 1991; Daly & Rake, 2003, p. 159; Else, 1997; Fagan & Rubery, 1999, p. 3; Nolan, 2000, pp. 13-14).

However, others would argue that much depends on the nature and terms of the state benefits, and that it is less demeaning (and potentially less dangerous) to be dependent on state benefits than on an individual man (Briar, 1992b). While mindful of the above criticisms, in this thesis, I argue that the three models of welfare state regimes can provide a useful framework to explore returners' employment situation.

Models of welfare capitalism and returners

Different policy frameworks produce different employment outcomes for returners. Comparative research in four European countries, for example, has found that in Western Germany (conservative) and the United Kingdom (liberal), mothers are more likely to return to low status occupations than in social democratic countries (Crompton, 2006b, pp. 129-134; Ginsburg, 1993; Joshi & Davies, 1992, pp. 7-8). Corporatist nations are most supportive of a traditional breadwinner family model. While men are the primary breadwinners, mothers are seen as secondary earners and tend to have short hours of employment (Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 44-45). Mothers' labour force participation rates are even lower than in liberal nations (Borchorst & Siim, 1992, pp. 153-154; Fagan, & Rubery, 1999; Fagan, O'Reilly & Rubery, 2000). However, recent changes in the labour market have also pressured corporatist nations to create policies to better reconcile paid work and motherhood. Social provision including childcare has been increased as a dual-earner family model gradually replaces the sole breadwinner family model (Leon, 2005, pp. 209-210).

In liberal nations, too, social policy support for returners is low (Crompton, 2006b, pp. 206-208; Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 35-66; Ferguson & Folbre, 1981, pp. 318-319; Ginn, Street & Arber, 2001; Myles, 1993, pp. 116-121; Orloff, 1993, pp. 303-316). Mothers in most liberal countries typically return to low status employment at the back of the job queue (Budig, 2002; Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 86-136; Dwyer, 2004; Else, 1997; Fagan & Rubery, 1999; Jonsson, 2004, p. 147; Leon, 2005, p. 211; Orloff, 1993; Prentice, 2004). Liberal nations couch mothers' return to work in the language of 'free choice' and lifestyle decisions. While there are increasing policy pressures on sole mothers to return to paid work, partnered mothers are said to be able to 'freely' choose whether or not to return to employment. However, such choices are made within various structural and cultural constraints and a 'choice rhetoric' merely hides discrimination against mothers (Applebaum, 2002, pp. 95-144; Castles, 1996, pp.

102-106; Crittenden, 2001, p. 235; Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 86-172; Gustafsson, 1994; McKie, Gregory & Bowlby, 2002, pp. 901-903; Provert, 2002; Sainsbury, 1996, pp. 49-72; Spoonley & Davidson, 2004; Williams, 2000).

Social democratic nations, unlike the liberal and corporatist models, see the reconciliation of paid work and family as a 'social and political' issue. These nations view children as a shared investment accruing shared costs (del Boca & Pasqua, 2005, pp. 135-137; Dwyer, 2004; Folbre, 1994, pp. 108-125; Leon, 2005; OECD, 2004 and 2005). Generous and universal social provision financed through taxation helps to absorb the cost of having children (Appelbaum, 2002, p. 145; Borchost & Siim, 1992, p. 146; Clarke & Langan, 1993, p. 25; Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 45-72; Daune-Richard, 2000; del Boca & Pasqua, 2005, pp. 126-127; Esping-Andersen, 2002, pp. 116-117; Fagan & Rubery, 1999, pp. 1-33; Gustafsson, 1994, pp. 49-53; Haataja, 2000; Joshi & Davies, 1992, pp. 7-8; Leon, 2005, pp. 207-217; Sainsbury, 1994, pp. 158-160; Sainsbury, 1996, pp. 100-106). Even with increasing OECD pressures to curtail public spending in recent years (as the Swedish economy, for example, responds to increased global competition and high production costs as in the other welfare models), the high level of social provision still means that returners are better cushioned against such pressures (Daune-Richard, pp. 2000, pp. 7-11; Leon, 2005, pp. 210-211; OECD, 2003, 2004, p. 13 and 2005; Thornqvist, 2006).

Further, in social democratic nations, and to a lesser extent, France, there are stronger policy efforts to adhere to the principles of labour market equity (Daly & Rake, 2003, p. 152; Daune-Richard, 2000, p. 5). Social policies in Scandinavian nations, such as Sweden, value part-time work (long part-time hours with full benefits), reducing the perception that only long paid work hours can achieve high productivity (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Lewis & Haas, 2005, p. 360). Returners in these countries are less likely to be marginalized even in part-time employment (Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 45-72). Mothers in Scandinavia have very high paid work participation rates, resembling those of the USA though Scandinavian mothers generally have good career jobs (Appelbaum, 2002; Bryson, Bittman & Donath, 1994, pp. 128-130; Daly & Rake, 2003; del Boca & Pasqua, 2005, pp. 135-137; Gustafsson, 1994, pp. 49-53; Lewis, 2003, p. 34; Melkas & Anker, 2001, p. 189; O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999; Ruggie, 1988, pp. 173-181; Sainsbury, 1996, pp. 63-90; Yeandle, 2001, pp. 149-150).

France, too, has social policies that provide generous support to mothers in paid work, and the number of French mothers in full-time employment is very high (Hantrais & Letablier, 1996; Jonsson, 2004, pp. 152-153).

In France, as in Scandinavia, the rates of fertility are also relatively high, showing that policies to increase mothers' employment do not necessarily need to compromise fertility rates. Social democratic nations have the lowest 'motherhood penalty' and the highest rate of mothers in the paid workforce (Gustafsson & Stafford, 1997, pp. 153-155; Harkness & Waldfogel, 2003, pp. 165-178; Karoly & Panis, 2004, pp. 63-66). They also display the lowest international poverty rates of mothers, especially sole mothers (Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 109-117; Hantrais & Letablier, 1996; Hobson, 1994, pp. 175-186; Myles, 1996; Wasoff & Dey, 2000). However, even in these countries, labour market equities have not been achieved: the rate of gender and occupational segregation in the Swedish paid work force, for example, is one of the highest in the western industrialised nations (Appelbaum, 2002, pp. 143-144; Esping-Andersen, 2002, p. 112; Mandel & Semyonov, 2005, pp. 950-955; Sundin, 1998, pp. 31-40).

Nevertheless, in terms of economic and employment outcomes, it is clear that out of the three policy frameworks, the social democratic framework provides the best protection for returners. The example of social democratic nations has shown that national policy frameworks can respond in such a way as to increase both mothers' employment and the fertility rate, reduce labour market inequities and facilitate the integration of mothers into the full-time paid workforce (Moore, 2004, p. 208; Sainsbury, 1996, pp. 219-224). By contrast, in most liberal as in corporatist nations, there are fewer provisions to support mothers, making it difficult for mothers to have economic independence and real choice (Cook, 2000, pp. 29-32; Crompton, 2006b, p. 60; Fagan & Rubery, 1996, p. 241; Williams, 2000). In the following section I explore the types of social policies that best support returners' employment, with a view to integrating these into the recommendations in the final chapter of this thesis.

Social provisions for returners under the three regimes

The discussion will focus on three key areas: childcare, paid parental leave and the taxation system. Generous and extensive provision of childcare, paid parental leave and tax allowances towards the costs of children allow mothers to engage in full-time

or long-hours part-time jobs (Brannen, Moss & Mooney, 2004, p. 203; Daune-Richard, 1998, pp. 220-227; Hofferth, 1996). In addition, designated 'daddy leave' enables fathers to share more childcare and domestic labour (Pasqua, 2005, pp. 199-201; Theobald & Maier, 2002, pp. 216-227).

Childcare availability and costs

Childcare is gendered, with mothers more than fathers performing the bulk of it (del Boca & Pasqua, 2005; Williams, 2000; Wilson, 1998; McRae, 2003). Social policies in most liberal nations reinforce this by construing childcare as primarily a mother's responsibility, making fathers less visible and less affected by childcare constraints (Bussemaker and van Kersbergen 1994; Crittenden, 2001). In most liberal nations, social policies around fatherhood have made fathers' financial role more explicit, but the concomitant role for fathers to engage more in unpaid care and domestic work remains understated (Lewis, 2001). This has a major impact on returners' employment.

In social democratic nations, as in France, generous child allowances and the provision of (near universal) high quality childcare eases mothers' dual roles as childcare provider and paid worker (Anttonen, 2005; del Boca & Pasqua, 2005, pp. 141-143; (Dex & Joshi, 1999 p. 645; Daly & Rake, 2003, p. 87). By contrast, in most corporatist and liberal nations, low provision of childcare limits returners' employment (del Boca & Pasqua, 2005). In the former West Germany and the Netherlands, mothers tend to work short hours and the paid work participation of mothers is generally low (Jonsson, 2004). In the UK, despite the 1998 National Childcare Strategy to increase public childcare, provision is still low and insufficient to meet the needs of parents, especially mothers on low income (Brannen, Moss, & Mooney, 2004, pp. 51-53; Jonsson, pp. 150-151; Leon, 2005, pp. 215-216).

In the USA, childcare is market-based (Cox & Presser, 2000, p. 122; Dex & Joshi, 1999 p. 645; Dex, Walters & Alden, 1993; Hofferth, 1996, p. 382; Kelloway & Barham, 1998, pp. 30-31). The low public provision for childcare and the drive to return mothers on state benefits to the paid workforce have contributed to many poor American mothers returning to full-time but low-paid and low status jobs (England & Folbre, 1999b, p. 198; Hofferth, 1996). Further, differential access to employer

funded childcare for working parents has led to a polarisation of American mothers: mothers in professional occupations have more access to a variety of childcare, compared with less qualified mothers in low-paid jobs, (Applebaum, 2002; Hofferth, 1996, p. 382; Dex & Joshi, 1999, p. 646; Haveman & Wolfe, 2002; Williams, 2000, pp. 55-93).

In New Zealand, childcare costs contribute to the involuntary part-time employment of mothers (Ang & Briar, 2002, p. 120; Barrett, 1997, pp. 162-163; Castles, 1996; McPherson, 2005, p. 34; NZCTU Report, 1998; OECD, 2004, p. 22). Until the Working for Families (WFF) package, income-tested Child Tax Credit and family allowances were insufficient to fully compensate most mothers for childcare costs (Baker & Tippin, 1999, p. 183; OECD, 2004, p. 22; OECD, 2005 and 2006). While the WFF package has increased the number of childcare facilities, including out-of-school-care (OECD, 2004, pp. 100-103; Ministry of Social Development, 2004; Perry, 2004, pp. 20-50), the implementation of the policy has not been as effective as the Ministry of Education would have hoped. For instance, although the Working for Families package has allocated 20 free hours (giving a potential of 92, 000 places to 3-4 year olds to attend a teacher-led early childhood centre), the Early Childhood Council suggests this is still insufficient to meet demand (Hill, 2007). In most cases the provision of childcare is ad hoc, uneven and in practice, not always totally free (McKay, 2007).

There are also concerns that current requirements for more stringent standards will increase costs and make childcare less affordable for some parents, again impacting on mothers' employment opportunities (OECD, 2004, p. 104-149). By contrast, universal and extensive childcare provision in social democratic nations ensures mothers have equal access to childcare (Jonsson, 2004).

Childcare hours

In addition to costs and availability, childcare hours need to fit in with mothers' paid work hours. In countries where the preschool and school hours align with mothers' paid work hours, mothers are more likely to work longer hours (Cox & Presser, 2000, p. 122; Fagan & Rubery, 1999, p. 8). For instance in France and Belgium where the school day is relatively long mothers in paid work tend to work full-time (Fagan &

Rubery, 1999, p. 8; Jonsson, 2004, pp. 152-153). By contrast, in places where school hours do not fit in with mothers' paid work hours, mothers tend to work part-time. In places such as the Netherlands and former West Germany, for example, schools have long lunchtime breaks, and mothers predominantly work short part-time hours (Daly & Rake, 2003; Jonsson, 2004, pp. 152-153).

In New Zealand, schools and most preschool centres are opened from about 9.00am to 3.00 or 3.30pm. Mothers with children under fourteen years generally have to work part-time or arrange third party childcare. This is often problematic for low-income mothers. The low and often irregular pay of mothers in part-time and casual or temporary employment often means these mothers find even subsidised after-school childcare too expensive to afford. In addition, mothers in New Zealand often have to take unpaid leave to be with children when schools are closed for such days as teacher-only days, teachers' union meetings or parent-teacher interviews. This complicates mothers' employment arrangements and mothers stand to lose pay (sometimes also the goodwill of employers) when they have to take time out of paid work to be with children.

By contrast, while mothers in Denmark and Sweden are also generally employed part-time to fit in with school hours, they are generally in good part-time work and have generous additional support in terms of extended paid leave for children. The effect of irregular time needed for childcare is less in these countries (Gustafsson, 1994; Joshi & Davies, 1992, pp. 7-8; OECD, 2004).

Leave provision

Mothers' ability to combine childcare and paid work also depends on the availability, generosity and extent of paid parental and sick leave. In most OECD countries, governments are increasing the amount and extent of parental leave as a means to maintain mothers' attachment to paid work (Dex & Joshi, 1999, pp. 646-647). However, in most industrialised nations including New Zealand, leave taking is gendered, with more mothers taking leave to care for children than fathers (Baker & Tippin, 1999, p. 48; Fine-Davis et al., 2004, p. 138; Gray & Hughes, 2005; Jones & Caser, 1995; McPherson, 2005; OECD, 2004, pp. 56-97).

In general, social democratic nations are more generous in both the amount and length of leave available to parents (Jonsson, 2004, p. 148). Finland, Norway and Sweden all have generous and extended paid leave, making it easier and less costly for mothers to take extended leave while the children are young (Crompton, 2006b, pp. 129-143; Dex & Joshi, 1999, p. 646; Jonsson, 2004, p. 148; Lewis, 2003, pp. 102-105; Lewis & Haas, 2005; OECD, 2005). Further, in these countries special 'daddy only leave' appears to have a gradual but positive effect on the domestic division of labour by encouraging more fathers to take leave for childcare. In Sweden, for example, the 1995 provision of non-transferable parental leave was increased to two months in 2002, with one month available only to fathers (Lewis & Haas, 2005, pp. 362-365; Thornqvist, 2006, pp. 319-320). This has contributed to the increased uptake of leave by fathers (in relatively better paid jobs) by 5 percent, making it more likely for fathers to share childcare and mothers to maintain paid work after childbirth (Anxo, 2002, pp. 104-107; del Boca & Pasqua, 2005, p. 137; Lewis & Haas, 2005, pp. 362-365).

Nevertheless, the rate of change in the domestic division of labour is slow and in general attributable more to mothers doing less housework than to fathers taking on an increased share of it (Baxter, 2002; Daune-Richard, 2000, pp. 1-13; Gustafsson, 1994, pp. 47-49; Thornqvist, 2006, p. 321). Even in Sweden where equality in paid work is the greatest in the western industrialised nations, the division of unpaid labour is still uneven and mothers still work shorter hours than fathers (Plantenga & Hansen, 2001, pp. 298-302). In 2001, for example, nearly a half of mothers and only 6% percent of fathers worked part-time (Jonsson, 2004, p. 148). Swedish mothers still suffer a wage penalty of 2 percent, due to loss of paid work time and lack of career progress in part-time work (Thornqvist, 2006, p. 321). Nevertheless, the effects of appropriate compensation for career breaks for childcare remain more positive in social democratic countries than in liberal ones.

In New Zealand, paid parental leave of 12 weeks was instituted only in 2002 (Gauthier, 1998, pp. 168-176). In December 2005 this was extended to 14 weeks with eligibility reduced from one-year continuous service with an employer to six months (<http://www.ers.dol.govt.nz/parentalleave/partners-fathers/what-is-available.html>). In 2006, it was extended to include self-employed parents. This was paid at NZD 372.12

per week before tax (OECD, 2004, pp. 181-184) and from July 1st 2007, the amount was increased by NZD 20.00 per week. However, this is still relatively low compared with the social democratic nations, but better than the USA and Australia who currently provide no statutory paid parental leave.

Further, although New Zealand fathers or partners are entitled to two weeks of unpaid leave, the short period of leave means mothers are likely to want to use all 14 weeks of leave to establish and maintain breastfeeding, so that partners are less likely to be able to make use of such leave. In addition, it is difficult to qualify for paid parental leave. Although mothers working part-time are not disqualified, they have to have been in continuous employment with the same employer (or be self-employed) for at least ten hours per week during the qualifying six months before birth. Mothers who work a full year (52 weeks) can receive the full payment, but mothers who work ten hours a week for at least six months qualify for a lower rate of payment. Moreover, not all mothers can afford to take the full 14 weeks away from work. Significantly, for returners, mothers who are not in permanent employment are unlikely to qualify for paid parental leave.

In the USA, mothers have even less support. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) (1993), provides unpaid leave for full-time employed individuals with caring responsibilities (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg & Kalleberg, 2002, p. 138; Folbre, 2004, pp. 236-237). This potentially reduces the cost of taking employment breaks (Board & Reynolds, 2004, pp. 325-352). However, it exempts firms employing fewer than 50 workers, so that few mothers, especially those on low incomes, can afford to use it (Gerstel & McGonagle, 1998, p. 513; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2005). Such policies have been said to increase the costs of employing full-time female employees, encouraging employers to create part-time low status employment (Caputo & Cianni, 2001, p. 322) Further, it has been noted that mothers who take advantage of such provision risk being seen as less committed workers (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2005, pp. 67-79).

Leave to care for sick children

In addition to maternity and paid parental leave, mothers need access to adequate leave to care for sick children. However, few workplaces in liberal nations offer such leave (Board & Reynolds, 2004, pp. 230-243; Holloway, 1999, pp. 438-460; Jenkins, 2004). Most liberal nations do not provide adequate sick leave to enable mothers to take time out to care for sick children. In New Zealand, for example, parents are allowed only five days of sick leave (but no provision of leave for sick children) and even this is not widely known, so that the take-up of such leave is low (OECD, 2004).

Further, mothers in part-time, casual or temporary employment are highly unlikely to have access to such leave. This is potentially a health issue, as studies have found that employees in such non-standard work are less willing or able to afford unpaid leave and more likely to put their health at risk by not taking sick leave when they, themselves, are sick (Spoonley & Davidson, 2004, p. 30). By contrast, in social democratic nations such as Sweden, parents are allowed 60 days of leave to care for a sick child, paid for at 70 percent of the normal pay (Jonsson, 2004). This makes it easier for mothers to pursue a career, since in most cases the gendered nature of childcare means that mothers are the ones who take time out of paid work to look after sick children.

Tax/Benefit system

A country's tax/benefit structure can also make a difference between full-time and low paid part-time work or no paid work at all for mothers (De Bruin, 1993; Fagan & Rubery, 1999, p. 2; Folbre, 2004, p. 238; OECD, 2004, p. 21; Hyman, 1993; Sainsbury, 1996, pp. 57-58). Research suggests that in many liberal OECD nations (excepting New Zealand), the second earner is taxed at a higher Marginal Effective Tax Rate (METR), making it more likely for partnered mothers to delay returning to work.

Research indicates that partnered mothers on low incomes are especially responsive to a tax system that increases the marginal effective tax rate (METR) of the second income earner (Aaberge, 2005, p. 205). It has been found, for instance, that a high Marginal Effective Tax Rate (METR) on coupled families have discouraged low-income mothers from returning to paid work (Johnson, 2005), thereby putting

pressure on mothers to become financially dependent on a breadwinner (St. John & Craig, 2004). By contrast, if all individuals were taxed at the same rate, it is estimated that this would increase paid work participation by the second earner (usually the mother) by four percent (OECD, 2006, p. 128).

On the other hand, a tax/benefit system that rewards families where wives stay at home, and where childcare is difficult to access, may contribute to married mothers on low income delaying returning to work. In countries where earnings are tested against the unemployment benefits of the spouse, for instance, wives of unemployed men tend to withdraw from paid work (Chan, 1993; Hofferth, 2000, p. 152; Sainsbury, 1996; St. John, 1993). In corporatist Germany, for instance, the tax system supports the single earner couple family through tax allowances and generous family allowances, so that married women and low-income mothers tend to delay returning to paid work (Daly & Rake, 2003, p. 87).

In New Zealand, the tax system is based on an individual unit rather than couple unit and this reduces the impact of taxes on the paid work behaviour of mothers (Chan, 1993); New Zealand's tax system does not deter partnered mothers from returning to paid employment. However, high effective marginal taxes for lone mothers receiving welfare benefits can create poverty traps and disincentives to return to paid work (OECD, 2004, pp. 22-138; OECD, 2006, p. 94).

Tax-funded family assistance

Where the tax uptake (in relation to provision of tax-funded assistance to families) is high as in Sweden, there is more provision of public services such as public provision of childcare and paid parental leave to enable more mothers to return to and stay attached to paid work. In the Nordic countries, there is consensus between the state, trade unions and private firms in support of tax-funded services and these countries have more universal and extensive support for mothers. By contrast, in most liberal and conservative countries there is more pressure against increased provision of public services to compensate for the costs of having children (Sainsbury, 1996, pp. 67-95; Stephens, 1996, pp. 38-39).

In terms of tax-funded spending, Scandinavia has the highest percentage of GDP going to tax among the three models (Kangas & Palme, 2005, pp.101-114; Kurian, 2005, pp. 151-160). The Swedish tax take was 51 percent of GDP in 2003, as opposed to 35.3 percent in the UK and 36.4 percent in New Zealand. Compared with other OECD countries with about 45 percent of public expenditure on average, the Swedish government spends close to 65 percent on job creation (especially in the public sector) and support for care work, in particular, care of children (Kurian, 2006, p. 154).

By contrast, liberal nations, such as the USA, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, are increasingly resorting to strategies aimed at “making work pay”. This means getting mothers into jobs, rather than careers. With the exception of the USA, mothers’ labour force participation rates in liberal nations are also lower than in social democratic nations (McPherson, 2005). Research suggests that increasing tax credits to increase mothers’ paid work participation rates appear to be working to some extent. It has been found, for example, that in the USA, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and in the UK, the Child and Working Tax Credits have had positive outcomes for low-income mothers (<http://www.hmrc.govt.uk/pdfs/wtcl.pdf>; Martin & Morrison, 2003, pp. 256-258).

In New Zealand, tax-funded family assistance is based on the couple unit so that some families are likely to lose out on the benefits of tax-funded assistance (St. John & Craig, 2004). However, since 2004 when the Working for Families package came into existence, tax-funded spending on low-to-medium income families has continued to increase and more families are able to access such assistance. Total spending on WFF is estimated to be NZD 1.1 billion by 2007/2008 (OECD, 2004, p. 48). In all there are four tax credits available to parents namely Family Support, In-Work Payment, Family Tax Credit and Parental Tax Credit. Of these Family Support has been increased the most. The WFF will increase the Family Support and Family Tax Credit components of family assistance while gradually replacing the Child Tax Credit with In-Work Payments to encourage mothers and other individuals on the benefit system to return and stay in paid work (Dwyer, 2004; Johnson, 2005).

However, there are several concerns about the package. Firstly, though it is quite substantial it is still more tightly targeted than comparable Australian or UK

programmes (Dwyer, 2005). Secondly, the relatively high METR on two-parent families resulting from the WFF policy is predicted to discourage low-income mothers from returning to paid work (Dwyer, 2005; Johnson, 2005; St. John & Craig, 2004). Further, while the In-Work Payment (where individuals have to work at least 20 hours per week) is targeted at discouraging individuals to return to paid work, it does not provide further impetus for them to look for more hours of work once this target is reached, making it less effective at achieving its goals of getting people off benefits and into paid work (Dwyer, 2005). In addition, the Child Tax Credit with its focus on parents in paid work is said to discriminate against those who are not in paid work (St. John & Craig, 2004). Nevertheless, once the difficulties are dealt with over the full implementation of the package, the policy is predicted to reduce child poverty substantially (Perry, 2004) and to assist more low-to-middle income families to have better 'choices' in regard to paid work and taking care of children (Johnson, 2005; St. John & Craig, 2004).

It can be seen that social policies can do much to reduce labour market inequities. However, social policies are influenced by both national and international legislative frameworks. The effectiveness of legislation to promote labour market equity needs to be seen in terms of three key dimensions: pay equity and equal access to opportunities to occupations and career progress; equity as equal opportunities and equal constraints; equity as full integration in both paid and unpaid work (Bailyn, 2003, pp. 139-140). The issue of labour market inequities for returners is now explored in light of national and international legislative frameworks.

National legislative framework

Currently, New Zealand does not have a strong legislative framework to protect women in general and returners in particular from discrimination in the labour market. For example, unlike social democratic nations and even liberal nations such as the UK, New Zealand has no legislation in favour of pay equity (Hyman, 2004). Pay Equity legislation was passed in 1990 by the outgoing Labour government, and promptly repealed in the same year by the incoming National Government (Hyman, 2004). By contrast, since the UK became a member of the European Community, it has had various policy changes to comply with EU standards and legislation. Part-time workers, for example, have benefited from the increased protection of part-time

employment required by Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome, and revised in Article 141 of the Treaty of Amsterdam (Crompton, 2006b, pp. 104-106; Suarez & Suarez, 2005, p. 66). This does not mean that the UK has achieved pay and employment equity, however. Indeed, its gender pay gap has also grown at times in recent years (Equal Opportunities Commission, UK).

New Zealand has a pay and employment equity policy that is not the subject of legislation. Instead, it consists of a series of research projects to discover the causes of pay and employment inequities in the state sector, and this will be followed in approximately five years' time by similar research in the private sector. Work is also under way to create a gender-neutral job evaluation tool, though international research has shown that this type of approach is normally less effective than legislation. In addition, although affirmative action policies can increase employment opportunities for minority groups, including women returners (Davidson & Burke, 2000; Ferber & Nelson, 1999), New Zealand does not have such policies.

In New Zealand, legislation such as the Human Rights Act (1993) is designed to prevent discrimination, including on the grounds of gender and age. Further, the Equal Pay Act (1970) is designed to protect employees' pay, but it has a narrow focus on equal pay for the same work. The predominance of returners in part-time and low status work, suggests that for many returners, pay equity is not likely to occur. Research suggests that in cases of suspected injustices, women and other marginal workers are less likely to complain for fear of employer reprisal and because the burden of proof rests on the complainant (Briar, 1994; Davidson & Cooper, 1992; Duncan, 2003; Earnshaw, 1998, pp. 116-118; Joshi, Paci & Waldfogel, 1999). The lowly position and the weak bargaining power of returners would suggest that returners as one of the lowest occupational groups are even less likely to endanger their precarious employment position by protesting about workplace inequalities.

While trade unions can negotiate on behalf of their members, in New Zealand throughout the 1990s trade unions were very much weakened by the Employment Contracts Act (Baker, 2001, p. 161; Duncan, 2003; Du Plessis, 1992). The move to individual contracts severely undermined New Zealand's equal pay legislation and during this period the legislation weakened the bargaining power of many employees

on individual contracts (Savage, 1986). However, since this Act was repealed and replaced with the Employment Relations Act (2000), some groups of women workers, notably nurses, have had success in obtaining significant pay rises through industrial campaigns by their trade unions. Currently slightly over half of all trade union members in New Zealand are female, and without the unions and legislative protection, arguably returners would be even more disadvantaged than they are. Nevertheless, current legislation does not appear to provide women, especially mothers returning to paid work, with equality in terms of equal pay and equal access to employment opportunities and career progress.

In addition, current equal employment opportunities (EEO) legislation works on the premise of equality with unequal constraints (Baliyn, 1993; Rappoport, Bailyn, Fletcher & Pruit, 2002). That is, the principle of 'fairness' largely disregards the constraints that different groups of employees face (Briar, 1994; Jones & Causer, 1995, pp. 51-58; Lewis, 1997, pp 13-14; Whitehouse, 1992; Webb, 1997). In most industrialised nations, policies assume that mothers can compete on the same level as workers without childcare responsibilities (Badgett & Folbre, 2001, p. 341; Fagan & Rubery, 1999, p. 6; Thomas & Davies, 2002, p. 390; Warren, 2004, pp. 102-103). Most family friendly policies such as paid parental leave and flexible hours and schedules, for instance, take the unequal childcare (and other domestic) responsibilities of mothers for granted. This makes it difficult for mothers to compete on equal terms with childfree individuals (Bostock, 1998; Crompton & Harris, 1998, pp. 123-133; del Boca & Pasqua, 2005, p. 137; Joshi, Paci & Waldfogel, 1999; Warren, 2004, pp. 103-118; Williams, 2000).

Further, in most industrialised nations, family friendly initiatives tend to uphold and maintain the rights of employers more than those of employees, constraining the ability of mothers to achieve real choice (Crompton, 2006b, pp. 108-112). Family friendly provisions such as parental leave and sick leave are still largely seen as women's issues (Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2006, pp. 25-27). In New Zealand, as elsewhere in the industrialised nations, the take-up of leave is highly gendered (Epstein, 2004; Board & Reynolds, 2004; Haar, 2005; Lambert, 1999, pp. 178-181; Lewis, 1997, p. 14). The difficulty of providing true flexibility for mothers suggests that the fundamental principle of equality of opportunity and the need for flexible

labour (because of work intensification) are not compatible (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005, pp. 62-63; Houston, 2005, pp. 1-8; Madsen, 2002; Maruani, 1998, p. 13; Owens, 2006, pp. 341-346).

In addition, EEO policies generally lack enforcement power, allowing employers the choice of setting EEO policies at their own discretion so that the effectiveness of such policies are variable and difficult to assess (Aitkenhead & Liff, 1991; Bielby, 1999, pp. 268-269; Suarez & Suarez, 2005, pp. 68-78; Torrie, 1994). Further, such policies tend to leave gender and power relations intact (Bielby, 1999; Suarez & Suarez, 2005). For instance, workplaces that have EEO policies can appear to provide equal opportunity practices, when in practice such a perception would only make inequality less visible, so that problems of unequal access for some groups are easy to ignore. It has been argued, for instance, that the perception that EEO legislation has made it easier for mothers to re-enter paid work has merely increased the tendency for mothers to be exploited in dead end jobs (Applebaum, 2002; Bunkle, 1993; Newell, 1993, p. 278).

The principle of equal treatment assumes that mothers and other individuals who give up paid work can depend on the income of a breadwinner. It does not address the life-time loss of incomes associated with career breaks, and the increased risk of poverty in old age (Luckhaus, 2001, pp. 405-407). For many women, especially returners, equity does not extend to equal access to equal pay and employment opportunities and career progress. The employment experiences of returners in the current study (as will be argued in the following chapters) clearly indicate that EEO policies have not addressed the unequal constraints of childcare. Although the Human Rights Commission has made equal pay for work of equal value a fundamental human right, the New Zealand gender gap currently suggests that for women generally, it would take another 40 years for pay equity to be achieved at the current rate of 10 percent reduction every two decades (Human Rights Commission, 2006). For returners, this would take much longer.

Finally, for labour market equity to be achieved, there must be full integration of paid and unpaid work. A smooth transition would encourage the full integration of part-time workers into the normal full-time workforce. Currently, however, research

suggests that it is difficult for marginal workers such as returners, to make the transition from part-time to full-time work (Ferrier & Sels, 2003). This contributes to the clustering of returners in low status employment (Tomlinson, 2004, 2006; Thornqvist, 2006).

Clearly, national legislation in New Zealand, as in other liberal nations, has not yet achieved pay and employment equity for women, and even less so for returners. However, the policies of OECD countries such as New Zealand are influenced to some extent by the international standards set by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations (UN), which provide viable models for the protection of workers through the International Labour Codes, such as the Convention on Hours of Work (1919) and the Convention on Maternity Protection (1919). It may be that closer adherence to the OECD and other international labour codes would benefit returners in precarious work.

International conventions

Important conventions that guide national policies include the Convention on Discrimination (1958), amended to include the ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles of Rights to Work, the ILO Social Declaration (1998) and the ILO Decent Work Agenda (1999). These conventions and declarations provide international codes and guidelines to monitor and regulate national labour markets and safeguard the working conditions of individuals. Member nations are obliged to work towards ILO recommended standards when they ratify them (Vosko, 2006).

As a member of the ILO, New Zealand is committed to put in place policies towards labour market equality, as recommended by the conventions that it has ratified over the years. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which New Zealand ratified, obliges New Zealand to create policies to address gender inequities and provide the necessary infrastructure (such as childcare and paid leave) to enable parents to combine paid work and family obligations. It combines various existing conventions regarding women's rights adopted by the United Nations over the years, and provides a standard against which New Zealand can measure its commitments to human rights

in general and women's rights in particular (Cartwright, 1996, p. 108; Chen, 1989, pp. 3-4).

The Platform for Action and Beijing Declaration (1995) required state signatories to CEDAW to address such issues as the unequal division of labour in order to allow parents, especially mothers, to have access "to a full range of human rights" (Lewis & Haas, 2005, pp. 365-366). There are also provisions for UNICEF representatives to evaluate the progress that states make toward achieving equality (McLaughlin, 2003, pp. 31-86). The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, too, requires parents to provide adequate childcare, and employers and the state to provide workplaces that enable parents to share more equally in paid work and family life (Lewis & Haas, 2005, p. 366). In particular, Articles 11b (recruitment and selection), 11c (promotions) and 11d (equal remunerations), aimed at reducing discrimination in the hiring, pay and promotion of employees if adopted, would increase returners' employment opportunities and increase mothers' bargaining power.

New Zealand has also ratified ILO Convention 183 (Maternity Protection), which commits New Zealand to pursue a national policy to promote practice and conditions of equal employment opportunities, including the breastfeeding rights of mothers. New Zealand has complied with this Convention by providing for 14 weeks of paid parental leave to new parents (14 weeks being a period that Convention 183 regards as a minimal requirement). In addition, the Human Rights Commission recommends extending the current paid parental leave scheme to include provisions relating to breastfeeding breaks and facilities (including a one-and-a-half-hour break in the paid working day). If followed, this would contribute to improving gender equity at work, increase and improve mothers' participation in the labour market, and help support the long-term health and well-being of both working mothers and their children (Human Rights Commission, 2006).

Further, the ILO Convention 156 on Workers and Family Responsibilities, which New Zealand has yet to ratify, obliges signatories to provide more support to enable parents to reconcile childcare and paid work more effectively. This convention requires member nations to address discrimination against workers with family responsibilities and has a particular bearing on returners. Currently, New Zealand has

begun implementation of the Working for Families policy, which will increase social provision towards the costs of children. It has also developed a ten-year plan to increase choices for individuals with caring responsibilities and for all workers to better balance paid work and childcare. However, if New Zealand were to ratify Convention 156, and adhere strictly to its obligations, it would have to provide even more extensive and generous support to mothers in paid work. This would potentially reduce the unequal domestic division of labour for mothers and allow mothers to compete on more equal terms with employees without childcare responsibilities.

In addition, today, the high rate of non-standard work internationally has increased pressure for international labour codes to address the precarious and gendered nature of such employment (Vosko, 2006, p. 53). The Convention on Part-time Work, 1994, adapted by EU and recently applied to part-time workers in the UK, has improved the conditions of part-timers. However, currently it does not include casual, seasonal or temporary employment where returners tend to cluster (Vosko, 2006, pp. 55-74). If extended to cover such precarious work, this Convention can improve the terms and conditions of returners in such employment. However, New Zealand has yet to ratify the Convention.

It must be noted, however, that ratification alone is not sufficient to bring about equality, since countries that ratify such conventions may appear to comply with code principles but still leave labour market barriers intact. For instance, New Zealand has ratified Convention 100 (Equal Remuneration) and Convention 111 (Discrimination on Employment and Occupation) and Australia has ratified Convention 156 in 1990. Nevertheless, in both countries mothers are still largely confined to low status jobs, suggesting the need for stronger regulations to ensure higher compliance (Bryson, Bittman & Donath, 1994; Still, 2002, p.16).

Nevertheless, current international labour codes provide useful guiding principles to member countries (Vosko, 2006). The requirements for member countries to provide equity to non-standard workers, set out in the ILO Decent Work Agenda and the Convention on Part-time Employment, for example, would ensure that part-time and casual workers have the same protection as full-time workers. However, currently, New Zealand's commitment to decent work has so far entailed one Decent Work

Action Plan, 2003 (setting data gathering premises), arising from the 2001 ILO Asian Regional Meeting on Decent Work, hosted by the New Zealand Ministry of Labour, Business New Zealand and New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (Department of Labour, 2006). Nevertheless, with the continuing labour shortages, international bodies such as ILO and OECD are pressuring member countries to provide better social policy frameworks aimed at reconciling paid work and parenting. These changes include policies to reduce working time and better address individuals' life-course changes (Vosko, 2006). Such pressures would increase returners' bargaining power to effect real change in mothers' employment prospects.

Summary and conclusion

It is clear that state policies can significantly affect mothers' employment opportunities. It can be seen that the best policies for returners, provided by social democratic nations (and France), are those that have the most extensive and generous support for mothers. These countries have the highest number of mothers in paid work (Rubery, 2002, pp. 121-127). Returners in these countries fare better than those in liberal countries. Swedish mothers, for instance, are able to return to career type jobs in part-time employment, while mothers in Finland are able to maintain a full-time career (Anker, 2001; Bolle, 2001a; Jonsson, 2004, pp. 148-149). By contrast, in most liberal and conservative countries, mothers receive less support, have fewer choices and have more difficulties in resuming careers, contributing to labour market inequities (OECD, 2004, p. 181). Further, in some liberal nations such as the USA, differential access to such provision has led to opposition from workers who are not entitled to such provision (Hallenshead, Sullivan, Smith, August & Hamilton, 2005, pp. 41-63), making it even harder for mothers to demand more extensive family friendly policies.

Returners in conservative or corporatist nations also do not receive extensive social policy support. In such countries, there is limited provision of childcare and paid leave, but more creation of part-time work, so that mothers are predominantly confined to short hours of paid work. In both liberal and conservative countries, mothers return to low status jobs at the back of the job queue and returners continue to be partially dependent on another source of income, notably that of the male breadwinner.

This chapter has explored the effects of state intervention on behalf of returners and found that social policies make a tremendous difference. The next chapter will explore returners' patterns of employment.

CHAPTER THREE: RETURNERS' EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

Introduction

This chapter describes the patterns of returners' employment position as a background to the current study. It notes the increase in female employment in the second half of the twentieth century and highlights the continuing increase in mothers' participation in the paid workforce. The chapter then explores the literature on returners, noting the processes contributing to returners' lowly labour market position. This chapter creates a contextual landscape with which to compare, interpret and understand the experiences of the mothers in the study for this thesis.

The term 'returner' is more widely used in countries such as New Zealand and the UK. However, the New Zealand literature on returners is extremely small. By contrast, there is a relatively substantial UK literature in this field, so that most of the references will be based on the work done in the UK. The first half of this chapter provides a context for understanding returners' downward occupational mobility. It outlines returners' patterns of employment in the English speaking, liberal nations such as New Zealand, Australia, the UK and the United States of America (USA) and compares this with the position of returners in social democratic nations. The second half of the chapter looks at the patterns whereby mothers in New Zealand and other liberal nations are currently being given the (worst) jobs at the back of the job queue that men and childfree women generally do not want.

The increase in mothers returning to paid work

In most western, industrialised nations such as the UK, the USA, the European Community (EU), Australia and New Zealand, the female rate of participation in paid work increased markedly in the second half of the twentieth century (Andersen, 2003, pp. 105-109; Baxter, 1998; Bird & West, 1987, p. 179; Davies & Jackson, 1993, p.1; Dex, 1987, p. 5; Hunt, 1988, pp. 2-6; Joshi & Hinde, 1993; Statistics New Zealand, 2005 pp. 61-81). Over the last 50 years, in these nations, there has been enormous growth in the re-entry employment of mothers of young children (Bogenschneider, 2002; Crompton, 2006b; Dilworth, 2004, pp. 241-245; Gutierrez-Domenech, & Bell, 2004; Hakim, 1996; Irwin & Bottero, 2000, p. 275; Jonung & Persson, 1993, p. 260; Joshi & Hinde, 1993, p. 205; OECD, 2004, pp. 15-65; Statistics New Zealand,

2005b). Much of this increase, however, was amongst middle class women, since working class wives and most single and childfree women were already much more likely to be in paid work. Until the early to mid 1970s, when welfare benefits were made more widely available in some liberal nations such as the UK, Australia and New Zealand, single mothers were also expected to go out to work (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005; Joshi & Hinde, 1993, pp. 203 –205; Nolan, 2000, pp.15-17). Since the 1990s, there has been once again tremendous pressure on lone mothers to go out to work, and cutbacks in welfare benefits in the UK, USA and New Zealand (Appelbaum, 2002; Else, 1997; Duncan, 2004;).

In New Zealand, in 1951, women made up 19 percent of the New Zealand labour force. By 1991, this had increased to 44 percent, though women were mainly in part-time employment (Davies & Jackson, 1993, p. xiii). Throughout the 1990s female employment continued to increase, despite slight dips during the 1980s and early 1990s, due mainly to the economic restructuring and subsequent decline in such industries as textiles. By contrast, the male employment rate stabilised, though it had declined in the 1980s (Statistics New Zealand, 1999 and 2005). By 2005, the labour force participation of men was 74.8 percent, while that of women was 60.2 percent (Statistics New Zealand, 2005).

As with mothers in other liberal nations, New Zealand mothers more than fathers are likely to take career breaks for children (Davies & Jackson, 1993; Dixon, 1996, pp. 72-73; Statistics New Zealand, 2005, pp. 9-64). Even as recently as 2004, New Zealand mothers with larger families tended to withdraw from paid work and returned only when their childcare responsibility diminished (OECD, 2004, pp. 12-71). However, these mothers tend to be Pakeha, middle class mothers who are more likely to have partners with higher and more regular incomes (Statistics New Zealand, 1999, 2005b).

In New Zealand as elsewhere in the industrialised nations, mothers are also more likely to be in part-time, non-standard employment, and to hold multiple jobs, than are fathers or women without childcare responsibilities (Baker, 2001, pp. 147-155; Disley & Wilcox, 1994; Else, 1996, pp. 63-69; Firkin, 2004, pp. 102-107; Statistics New Zealand, 1999; Taylor, Baines & Newell, 2004, pp. 114-126). It is estimated that one

in three women in New Zealand is in part-time employment (McLaren, 2004, pp. 232-235; Statistics New Zealand, 2001, pp. 17-54). In terms of ethnicity, New Zealand Maori and Pacific Island women are more likely to be in low paid, non-standard employment than are Pakeha women (Hyman, 2004, p. 12; Spoonley & Davidson, 2004, pp.17-29).

Further, following the international trend, more New Zealand mothers of dependent children are returning to work (Hillcoat-Nalletamby, Dharmalingam, & Pool, 1998, pp. 1-18; Statistics New Zealand, 1999; Statistics New Zealand, 2005, p. 62). However, the increase in mothers' employment is not as marked as in the other countries mentioned above. By 2001, for instance, only 39 percent of New Zealand mothers were in paid work, though irregular and short employment hours and low pay mean that the incidence of mothers holding more than one job is high (Spoonley & Davidson, 2004; Statistics new Zealand, 2001 and 2005). The less secure and lower paid the employment, the greater the need for earlier returns and the higher the potential for mothers to hold multiple jobs. In 2003, for instance, New Zealand women made up 45 percent of the total labour force, but they accounted for 58 percent of all multiple-job holders for both full-time and part-time employment, especially in the service industries (McPherson, 2005; OECD, 2004; Statistics New Zealand, 2005, pp. 69-70).

In New Zealand as elsewhere in the industrialised nations, various factors have contributed to the growth in mothers' employment. A significant factor was the decline in manufacturing and concurrent growth in part-time employment, particularly in service sectors (Bird & West, 1987, pp. 185-186; Crompton, 2006; Dixon, 1996, p. 74; Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2001; O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999, pp. 95-100; Spoonley & Davidson, 2004, pp. 26-32). In addition, the higher the opportunity costs of employment breaks, the faster mothers will return to paid work. In the UK, for example, the higher the earnings of mothers, the more likely they are to return to employment earlier (Dex & Joshi, 1999, p. 644; Moore, 2004).

However, while mothers' level of qualifications was a key factor influencing their decisions to re-enter paid work before the 1990s, its influence is less significant today (Dex, 1985, 1987, 1988; Dex & Shaw, 1986). For instance, in the UK in the 1980s,

mothers with professional qualifications returned earlier than those with few or no qualifications, but by the 1990s, both mothers with and without professional qualifications were returning to paid work faster (Smeaton, 2006, pp. 1-6). In most industrialised, English speaking nations, mothers' level of education has increased and mothers' choice to return is influenced more by the household's need for mothers' earnings to supplement the decline in men's real wages (Baker, 2002; Dex & Joshi, 1999; Dex, 2003, OECD, 2004).

Shorter breaks between children

Internationally, the trend is for mothers to return to paid work faster and to take shorter employment breaks between children (Dex & Joshi, 1999). In the USA, for example, the number of married mothers with youngest child under six re-entering paid work increased from 11.9 percent in 1950 to 62.8 percent in 2000 while that of mothers with older children (6-17 years) increased from 28.3 percent in 1950 to 77.2 percent in 2000 (Hartmann, 2004, p. 227).

Further, in most of these nations, the proportion of mothers in continuous employment has also increased since the 1980s (Caputo & Cianni, 2001, p. 312; Crompton, Dennett & Wigfield, 2003, pp. 2-6; Dex & Joshi, 1999; pp. 641-642; Gutierrez-Domenech & Bell, 2004, pp. 11-12; Hofferth, 2000, p. 131; Joshi & Davies, 1993, p. 55; Joshi & Hinde, 1993, p. 206; Millar, 2001, p. 29). In Western Europe more mothers of young children are in paid work and fewer mothers are exiting it (Jonsson, 2004). Nevertheless, in all these nations, labour market equity has not been achieved (OECD, 2002, 2003, and 2004).

Persistent labour market inequities

The labour market is still highly segregated with women more likely to be under-employed or to be employed in different sectors of the economy, at lower levels and on less favourable terms, than men (Anker, 2001; Hakim, 1996; OECD, 2004, pp. 16-63; Statistics New Zealand, 2001). Even in the twenty-first century, men still dominate in top positions in industry and outnumber women in better positions in teaching and other typically female-dominated care work (Korvajarvi, 1998; Levin, 2004). On average, men/fathers are more likely to have regular hours of paid work, be

in the better-paid jobs at the head of the job queue and enjoy upward job mobility than are women/mothers (Beehr & Juntunen, 1990; Elder & Johnson, 2001, p. 263).

Nevertheless, men's incomes have been declining in real terms for some decades (Baker, 2001). The reduction in the gender pay gap worldwide since the 1970s has been largely a result of falling real wages for men, rather than increased pay for women. For the average family, falling male wages have contributed to the need for families to have more than one income, and mothers are increasingly pressured to return to employment (Baker, 2001; Brannen, Moss & Mooney, 2004, p. 50; Callister, 1998; Estes & glass, 1996, p. 410; Lewis, 2003). However, while mothers' earnings now form an essential and integral part of the family income, mothers' additional responsibility for the economic (as well as emotional and physical) well being of their families has not been matched with increased economic independence. Mothers still do not earn enough to maintain themselves and their children on their wages without falling into poverty (Baker, 2001, p. 159; Irwin & Bottero, 2000, p. 274; Lewis, 2003; McGregor, Pajo & Dewe, 1999; OECD, 2004, p. 15). Such inequities are reflected in the current labour market position of returners.

Returners' labour market position

On average, returners fare worse than men and childfree women (Carroll, 1999, pp. 101-120; Crompton, 2006, pp. 257-266). Research suggests that mothers are given the most junior and least secure positions at the back of the queue, predominantly in non-standard employment (Baker, 2001, pp. 147-148; Brannen & Moss, 1991; Davidson & Bray, 1994, pp. 28-30; Ferber & Nelson, 1999; Fitzsimons, 2002, pp. 73-79; Hesse-Biber & Carter, pp. 80-81; Hopfl & Atkinson, 2000; Little wood, 2004, pp. 129-133; McPherson, 2005; Mason, 2000; Spoonley, de Bruin & Firkin, 2002). In the 1960s-1990s and into the early twenty-first century, despite the increased provisions of public childcare in most industrialised countries, family size and the age of the youngest child continued to restrict mothers' full-time engagement in paid work (Dex & Joshi, 1999, pp. 643-644; Dex, Joshi & Macran, 1998; Dex, Water & Alden, 1993; Glezer & Wolcott, 1997, p. 27; Hardey & Glover, 1991; Summerfield & Gill, 2005, pp. 47-48; Yohalem, 1997, p. 34). Research suggests that mothers who take career breaks face downward occupational mobility and are not able to recapture the career

trajectory they had before childbirths (Bittman, 1999, p. 29; Dex, 1987, pp. 66-68; Dex & Shaw, 1986; Mason, 2000; Tomlinson, 2006a).

Returners' downward occupational mobility

Returners' downward occupational mobility is not a new phenomenon. The effect of a broken career was identified and widely reported in research in the 1980s-1990s (Beechey, 1986, p. 94; Dex, 1987, pp. 82-89; Elias, 1988, pp. 84-88; Felmler, 1995, p. 169; Greenhalgh & Stewart, 1985; Main, 1988; Martin and Roberts, 1984; Sanders & Reed, 1982). Although more recent research has focused more on work-life balance for parents, this does not mean that the problem no longer exists. In fact, most liberal welfare nations, including New Zealand, have not been able to halt mothers' downward occupational mobility (Dex, 1990, pp. 129-136; Hamon, Cleland, & Toulson, 1999; Jacobs, 1999; Mason, 2000; Tomlinson, 2006a, pp. 67-70; Whitehouse, 1992).

Even short-term withdrawal from the labour force can have detrimental effects (Glass & Riley, 1998, pp. 1402-1428). In most liberal nations, returners in part-time (flexible) employment have difficulty making the transition from part-time to full-time employment (Conley, 2003, pp. 454-475; Tomlinson, 2004 and 2006a). Highly skilled returners (in part-time or mommy track positions) are also trapped in positions that offer few opportunities for career progress (Belet, Glorieux & Laurijissen, 2004, pp. 172-176; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004, pp. 151-169; Bolle, 2001; Boulis, 2004; pp. 174-204; Caputo & Cianni, 2001, pp. 317-323; Carroll, 1999, p. 113; Ginn & Arber, 1998, pp. 157-158; Jacobs, 1999, pp. 35-43; Noonan & Corcoran, 2004, pp. 130-149; Scherer, 2004).

Both public and labour market policies contribute to returners' occupational downgrading. Unlike in social democratic nations, in liberal nations there is minimal state intervention in the labour market, and returners in these nations are more vulnerable to employers' discrimination. In liberal nations such as the UK, USA and New Zealand, employers' creation of low status part-time or flexible employment has contributed to the predominance of mothers in such positions (Gerson, 2003).

While flexible employment is touted as an effective strategy for mothers to reconcile childcare and paid work, in practice employers are more likely to create flexible employment to smooth demand fluctuations than to assist mothers to reconcile paid work and childcare (Ferber & Nelson, 1999; Votinius, 2006, p. 282). Mothers, however, are restricted to such jobs due to their role as primary childcare givers. While there is no biological reason why fathers should not be primary care givers as well, the reality is that government policies and employers' practices reinforce mothers' responsibility for childcare and make fathers unavailable (Booth & Frank, 2005, p. 12; Else, 1992 and 1997; Fagan & O'Reilly, 1998, p. 9; Ginn & Arber, 1995; Crompton, 2006; McLaren, 2004, pp. 232-235; Tomlinson, 2006b).

Often the discontinuity and occupational downgrading of returners' employment is due not to 'career breaks' for having children, but to the lack of state regulations that allow employers to create part-time and other non-standard employment, according to market demands. Such jobs generally lack the features of what both men and women see as a good job: reasonable pay and employment conditions, including a range of benefits such as statutory leave and fringe benefits (Bryson, 1996; Fagan & O'Reilly, 1998, pp.8-9).

Returners and non-standard/ precarious employment

The term 'standard work' refers to full-time, permanent employment where 'standard' workers are expected to be available on a regular basis for long hours. 'Non-standard work', on the other hand, refers to work done on a part-time, temporary or casual basis (Votinius, 2006, pp. 265- 282). Employers' perceptions that mothers have other calls on their time and energy contribute to the creation of part-time positions for mothers (Boswell & Jenkins, 1994; Reskin & Padavic, 1999; Votinius, 2006). While such flexibility allows employers to meet market fluctuations, mothers in such positions are frequently marginalized in terms of pay and career opportunities, since part-time, temporary and casual jobs at the back of the queue are generally less well paid, and lack career opportunities (Badgett & Folbre, 2001; Blakemore, 2003; Davidson & Bray, 1994; Hansen, 2004; Hogue & Kirkpatrick, 2003, pp. 678-682; Jaumotte, 2005, p. 107; Joshi & Davies, 1992; Ranson, 2002; Williams, 2000).

Further, in places such as the UK, USA and New Zealand, there has been a shift in the job market from full-time permanent positions to more part-time and temporary work, especially in service industries (Castles, 1996; Conley, 2003; Duncan, 2004, pp. 110-180; Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2001; Gazier, 2002; Gazier, 2002a; O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999, pp. 95-100; Spoonley & Davidson, 2004, pp. 26-27; Spoonley, de Bruin & Firkin, 2002; Wharton, 2004, p. 91). In addition, there are fewer jobs with a fixed 38 or 40-hour-week and 'standard' jobs have tended to expand, requiring longer hours, including widespread 'off the clock' working (Newman & White, 2006, p. 217; Spoonley & Davidson, 2004). While men are more likely to be employed in positions with such long (non-standard) hours, women, especially mothers are more likely to dominate part-time and temporary/casual positions.

Similarly, the concept of an upwardly mobile career linked with the 'normal', nine-to-five, year-round employment with the same employer, and with statutory benefits and entitlements, typical of the 'male' norm, is no longer prevalent (Kilpatrick, 2006, pp. 153-174; Meyer, 1996, p. 450; Newman & White, 2006, p. 217). Some writers have also suggested that the 'normal career' has given way to a 'new portfolio career' that is said to be portable and can consist of more than one job with more than one employer (Handy, 1994; Inkson, 2004, pp. 81-92). However, this largely applies to a more privileged workforce, with highly marketable skills and no dependents, rather than to most returners (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005). Indeed, a portfolio career could mean making different childcare arrangements each day. This is not a lifestyle most returners would willingly choose. Nevertheless, discussion of non-standard work takes place against the contrast of this supposed market, standard, full-time and careered employment.

Further, although employed students and semi-retired older workers are seen as 'non-standard' workers, the great majority of 'non-standard' employees are mothers. Male workers, especially fathers, are more likely to be seen as normal or standard workers with careers, whereas mothers are more likely to be seen as 'abnormal', non-standard or deviant workers. Not surprisingly, divisions between standard and non-standard work coincide to a large extent with gender divisions, as reflected in the pay or motherhood penalty accruing to returners in low status occupations.

Returners' low pay and the motherhood penalty

Internationally, women as a group earn less than men, but mothers who take employment breaks are likely to earn even less (Andersen, 2003, p. 104; Bruegel & Gray, 2005, pp. 149-151; Budig & England, 2001; Dex, Walters & Alden, 1993, p. 164; Statistics New Zealand, 2005, p. 9). On average, marriage and children increase men's/fathers' earnings but lower women's/mothers' (Avellar & Smock, 2003, pp. 597-605; Benschop, Helsema & Schreurs, 2001, p.6; Bittman, 1999, pp. 28-40; Budig & England, 2001; England & Folbre, 1999; Crittenden, 2001, p. 234; Jacobs, 1999, pp. 35- 43; Perna, 2005, pp. 11-13; Thomas & Davies, 2002, p. 390; Waldfogel, 1997). Mothers' earnings losses can be due to years out of paid employment, being employed for fewer hours, lower earnings from loss of employment experience and generally lower pay from low paid part-time jobs (Fagan & Rubery, 1999, pp. 231-237; Joshi & Davies, 1993, p. 53; Macran, Joshi & Dex, 1996). Further, mothers returning to part-time, female dominated occupations have fewer opportunities for upward mobility where pay increments can be expected (Blakewell, 2001, pp. 153-158; Davidson & Bray, 1994, pp. 13-17; Dex, 2003, p. 3 & p. 79; Dex & Scheibl, 2002, p. 28; Fothergill & Feltey, 2004; Hanson & May, 1992, pp. 324-335; Howell & Bronson, 1996; Jackson, 1991, pp. 98-110; O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999, pp. 95-100; Williams, 2000).

Returners are also less likely to be able to have the same access to pension income and insurance schemes, so that over a lifetime their total incomes are likely to be a lot less (Davies, Joshi & Peronaci, 2000; Ginn & Arber, 1993, pp. 47-56, 1998, pp. 156-171, and 2001, pp 44-66; Ginn, Daly & Street, 2001; Ginn, Street & Arber, 2001, pp. 11-30; Glover, & Arber, 1995, pp. 165-178 and 2001; Joshi, Paci, & Waldfogel, 1999; Schmid, 2002). Although the New Zealand state superannuation system is based on age and not economic contribution, New Zealand returners still face lower retirement incomes, since career interruptions mean that mothers are not able to top-up their incomes from work-related superannuation schemes (St. John & Gran, 2001, pp. 199-214).

Mothers also suffer additional discrimination, both compared with childless women and, much more so, compared with fathers (Jones & Causer, 1995; Waldfogel, 1997). The additional loss of pay accruing to mothers is termed the motherhood wage

penalty (Bittman, 1999, pp. 28-29; England & Folbre, 1999, pp. 39-41; Harkness & Waldfogel, 2003; Headlee & Elfin, 1996; Waldfogel, 1997, pp. 210-216; Williams, 2000, p. 274). Even in social democratic nations such as Sweden, motherhood is linked with lower career opportunities (Liff & Ward, 2001, pp. 30-31; Sandberg & Cornfield, 2005; Williams, 2000). However, the motherhood wage gap is smaller in such countries (Bihagen & Ohls, 2006, p. 40; Desai & Waite, 1991, p. 552).

On average, the more children a mother has, the wider is the motherhood wage gap (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005, p. 78; Ginn, Street & Arber, 2001, p. 21). In the EU, it has been found that the gender wage gap widens for mothers of dependent children, averaging from 14.4 percent for childfree women to more than 27 percent for mothers with two or more children (Boeri, del Boca & Pissarides, 2005, pp. 17-82). A British study similarly found that compared with a childfree woman, a mother of two who takes a career break while her children are of pre-school age, returning to part-time employment when they are at school would forfeit 57 percent of her childless counterpart's gross earnings between the ages of 25 and 59 (Joshi & Davies, 1993, p. 52). In New Zealand the motherhood penalty has been estimated at 7-10 percent of the gross hourly rate of a childfree woman (OECD, 2004, p. 75).

Further, the wage penalty for mothers who return to predominantly female-dominated work (typically care work) is more than for those returning to traditionally male-dominated occupations (England, Budig, & Folbre, 2002, pp. 455-457; Folbre, 2004, pp. 236-238; Tomlinson, Olsen, Neff, Purdam, & Mehta 2005). In addition, the more extended the time out of paid work, the higher are the penalties for mothers, and research suggests the wage penalty is not declining despite anti-discrimination and equal employment opportunities legislation (Alvellar & Smock, 2003, pp. 597-607; Budig & England, 2001; Davies, Joshi & Peronaci, 2000).

Mothers' low earnings contribute to the gender pay gap (Ang & Briar, 2005; Boeri, del Boca & Pissarides, 2005). Research indicates that the pay gap is widest in liberal nations and narrowest in social democratic nations (Jonsson, 2004, p. 145; Mandel & Semyonov, 2005, pp. 949-950). Generous support for mothers in paid work and the regulation of part-time employment are some factors that contribute to mothers' better economic position in these countries (Esping-Andersen, 2002, pp. 112-113; Fagan &

Rubery, 1999, pp. 3-9). The effects of social policies will be discussed in Chapter Three. In the following section labour market processes that contribute to returners' lowly labour market position are explored.

Processes leading to returners' lowly market position

Gendered workplace policies and processes contribute to the disadvantaged position of returners (Edwards & Wacjman, 2005, pp. 64-86). Such practices reflect discrimination at the wider societal level that is often firmly established and difficult to redress (Acker, 1990, pp. 139-150 and 1999; Barnett & Rivers, 2004, p. 13; Dipboye & Collella, 2005; Gelfand, Nishii, Raver & Schneider, 2005, pp. 92-93; Halford, Savage & Witz, 1997, pp. 2-6; Headlee, & Elfin, 1996, p6; Heilman & Haynes, 2005; McIvor, 2004, pp. 25-32; McKie, Bowlby & Gregory, 2001; Okin, 1991; Petersen & Saporta, 2004; Wade, Romano & Blue, 2004; Williams, 2000. p. 3). Since the majority of women become mothers at some stage, and in so doing are likely to lose pay and status, workplace practices that discriminate against mothers amounts to sex discrimination (Williams, 2000).

However, there is some debate in international literature about whether mothers experience additional discrimination from employers. Writers who disagree with the view that workplace processes contribute to mothers' lowly paid work position argue that mothers' earnings and market status are low because they expend less time and energy on paid work (Becker, 1985). They suggest that mothers choose to be part of the secondary labour market (Hakim, 1996, p. 81; Hakim, 2000). I will return to these issues in Chapter Four, where returners' paid work position will be explained. In the next section I focus on labour market processes that relegate returners to a low status employment position.

Exclusionary practices

Historically, employers, co-workers and unions have collaborated to keep women from competing for men's jobs, as well as better-paid positions in female-dominated occupations (Cockburn, 1983, 1985, and 1991; Hartmann, 1978; Summerfield 1984; Walby, 1990). Until the institution of equal employment opportunities and anti-discrimination legislation, employers were able to use group norms such as gender and ethnicity, as well as physical characteristics such as strength and height, as

recruitment criteria, so that some groups were found to better fulfil the conditions than others (Cockburn, 1988, p. 32; Cockburn, 1991, p. 28; Dex, 1985).

Today, however, state legislation and changing social norms protect women, including mothers, from outright exclusion from jobs. Women, especially mothers, are also more likely to themselves be members of unions, and occasionally, to be union leaders. Nonetheless, although mothers are no longer excluded from paid work, female union members are far more likely than their male counterparts to be recruited into lower paid jobs. The common practice of making pay claims on a percentage basis, for example, means that the better-paid workers (predominantly male) continually receive larger rises than the predominantly female, low-paid staff. Although the unions are not responsible for this, they also do not always pursue the issues faced by their low paid female members as energetically or effectively as they might (Baron & Bielby, 1982, pp. 175-185; Conley, 2003, p. 474; Tomlinson, 2005).

Current workplace practices

Current workplace practices reflect employers' preference for individuals without care responsibilities or non-work demands. Such practices discriminate against returners and other individuals with childcare and unpaid work commitments (Ainsworth, 2002, pp. 579-591; Earnshaw, 1998; Glover, 2001, pp. 117-129; Hansard Society Commission, 1990; Jones & Proctor-Thomson, 2003; Marger, 2005; Paetzold, 2005, p. 346; Petersen & Dietz, 2005, pp. 144-159; Robinson, 2001, p. 158; Shore & Goldberg, 2005, pp. 210-211; Still, 2002; Stone-Romero, 2005, pp. 250-261; Stroh & Reilly, 1999; Wade, Romano, & Blue, 2004, pp. 2550-2558; Wharton, 2004, pp. 174-178; Wilson, 1998, pp. 396-410). Employers' policies and practices have been linked with discrimination on the basis of age, gender and motherhood (Burns, 2000, pp. 11-16; Dex, 1987, p. 121; Dale, 1987, pp. 343-344; McGregor & Gray, 2001; Williams, 2000; Wilson, 1998, pp. 408-410).

Older workers, for example, are often given fewer opportunities for training and suffer from stereotypical perceptions, where employers see them as possessing less relevant skills, less productive, and more resistant to change and to using new technology (Duncan, 2001, pp. 30-36; Smith, 2001). Some recent New Zealand studies further found that employers regard women as older employees at the early

age of 35-40, compared to men at age 50 (Briar, 1997; Burns, 2000, pp. 6 –13; McGregor & Gray, 2001 and 2003; Smith, 2001, p. 221). To get around this barrier, women sometimes resort to ‘age proofing’ strategies by dyeing their hair, for instance (Jones & Proctor-Thomson, 2003). Although most women do dye their hair, for older mothers, creating a more youthful appearance can make a difference between obtaining a well-paid job or not.

Such covert discrimination is also reflected in employers’ tendency to recruit in their ‘own image’ (Barnett, 2005, pp. 130-148; Cleveland, Vescio & Barnes-Farrell, 2005, pp. 151-183; Crompton & Harris, 1998; Gelfand et al., 2005, p. 98; Levin, 2004, pp. 358-391; Petersen & Diez, 2005, p. 145). Employers often rationalise such practices on the basis of team or organisational ‘fit’. However, the concept of organisational or team ‘fit’ is non-specific and involves unquantifiable judgements about the personal characteristics of applicants (Jewson & Mason, 1986, pp. 44-47; Teigen, 1999, pp. 95-99). Perceptions of ‘acceptability’ are subjective and open to interviewer bias (Atkinson, Giles & Meager, 1996, pp. 15-16; Cockburn, 1991, p. 28; Collinson, Knights & Collinson, 1990, pp. 118-132; Gelfand et al., 2005, pp. 95-97; Kutcher, de Nicolis & Brogger, 2004; Oliphant & Alexander, 1982; Rubin, 1997, pp. 26-32). A ‘returner’ who appears to lack confidence, for example, may be seen as less competent, as well as not ‘suitable’ for any but the most menial jobs.

Further, informal recruitment methods such as word-of-mouth from colleagues and friends or family can also be discriminatory in that they exclude employees who do not belong to such networks (Atkinson, Giles & Meager, p. 18; Edwards & Wajcman, 2005, pp. 79-81; Hanson & May, 1992, pp. 389-390; Hanson & Pratt, 1995 pp. 172-173). Mothers who take extended career breaks, for example, lose work-related networks and are likely to be excluded by recruitment strategies based on informal contacts (Bailyn, 2003, p. 158; Daune-Richard, 1988, pp. 269-271; Felmlee, 1995. p. 183; Munch, McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1997, pp. 509-519). However, employers, especially those in unskilled or semi-skilled non-manual work where returners tend to cluster, often use informal networks when recruiting staff (Hanson & May, 1992; Hanson & Pratt, 1995; Jenkins, Bryman, Ford, Keil, & Beardsworth, 1983, pp. 261-265; Pratt & Hanson 1991).

Research also suggests that employers prefer the interview as a screening device in recruitment (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Brown, 1999; Harris, Toulson & Livingston, 1996, pp. 71-87; Hunter & Hunter, 1984; Jenkins et al., 1983). While employers view such practices as cost-effective, various commentators have noted that interviews are subject to personal bias (McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994; pp. 599-610; Mullins, 1982, pp. 163-173; Reilly & Chao, 1982, pp. 1-54; Smith-Doer, 2004, pp. 120-121; Taylor & O'Driscoll, 1995; Tubiana & Ben-Shaker, 1982). Untrained or inexperienced interviewers, for example, are more likely to use leading questions and less able to probe for more relevant information; they are also more likely to associate competence and job suitability with a candidate's level of attractiveness and other non-verbal behaviour (Brown, 1999; Howard & Ferris, 1996, pp. 127-129; Keenan, 1980, pp. 43-45).

While it is possible to have written policies against attitudes and prejudices (by careful avoidance of questions referring to a woman's age, and/or gender, for instance), such changes will often leave organisational cultures and structures unchanged. These practices can increase the potential for mothers to be discriminated against (Elg & Jonnergard 2003, pp. 154-161; Hogue & Noon, 2004, pp. 498-500; Rubin, 1997, pp. 24-26; Jackson, 1991; Jonsson, 2004, pp. 145-147; Petersen & Dietz 2005, p. 154; Walters & Alden, 1993; Williams, 2000).

Employers' assumptions about mothers and fathers

Employers' beliefs, assumptions and preferences influence their recruitment and selection policies and practices, contributing to the persistent gender segregation of the workforce (Adkins, 1995, pp. 102-230; Armstrong & Armstrong, 1990 pp 94-95; p. 110; Crompton & Sanderson, 1990; Dipboye, 2005, p. 286; Evetts, 1994; Hanson & Pratt, 1995, p. 157; Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, pp. 88-89; Padavic & Reskin, 2002, pp. 74-86; Newsome, 2003, pp. 320-337; Reskin & Roos, 1990, pp. 36-63; Roos & Gatta, 1999, p. 120). For instance, employers appear to prefer men (and some childfree women) in senior management positions, while preferring returners in low level, typically service jobs such as frontline positions where appearance matters (Bihagen & Ohls, 2006; Davy, 2003; Davy & Handy, 2004, pp. 37-50). A New Zealand study, for example, found that employers preferred older mature women (mostly mothers) for call centre jobs because they are seen as possessing 'warmth'

and 'patience'. In some places such as the UK and New Zealand, some employers were found to create part-time positions for mothers in service jobs, especially where men did not want the work (Davy, 2003; Dex & Josh, 1999, p. 652). In other cases, employers appeared to prefer school leavers and tertiary students to mothers returning to paid work as checkout staff in supermarkets (Dutton, Warhurst, Nickson & Lockyer, 2005).

Even at entry level, employers have been found to allocate different jobs to men and women with the same qualifications based on their stereotypical beliefs (Marini & Fan, 1997, pp. 589-602). Once workers are recruited into a job, labour market structures tend to provide them with different career paths, where men/fathers, at the head of the queue, tend to have jobs that provide stability, career steps and high pay. Women/mothers are channelled into low status jobs at the back of the queue where there are no or few career opportunities.

Employers' assumptions about mothers and fathers contribute to gendered employment opportunities for mothers and fathers. In most industrialised nations, workplace practices assume that mothers are aberrant, unlike 'normal' women with no dependent children or men/fathers who do not have the major day-to-day responsibility for child rearing and domestic work (Acker, 1992, pp. 249-257; Herd, 2005, pp. 32-41; Liff & Ward, 2001, pp. 30-31). The 'normal' full-time working day is built around the premise that the 'typical' or 'ideal' worker does not have to be home in time to shop and cook the evening meal and can work long hours (Jones & Causer, 1995, p. 51). Further, research indicates that organisations with career structures expect a degree of commitment in their senior positions which is incompatible with running a home and caring for children (Gatfield, 1996; Gregory, 2003, pp. 97-106; Liff & Ward, 2001, pp. 30-31; Taylor, 1988, p. 176).

Employers' assumptions that women will accommodate the conflicts between paid work and family demands influence the types of jobs that they create for men/fathers and women/mothers (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg & Kalleberg, 2002, p. 145). Employers appeared to create part-time positions for female employees in female-dominated jobs as a cost-saving strategy (contingent flexibility), but not for men in male-dominated industries (Cohen & Huffman, 2003, pp. 437-445; Reimer, 2003, pp.

120-121). In male-dominated industries, where men/fathers predominate, employers prefer overtime and shift work (providing better pay for men) but in service areas such as call centres, flexibility requires on-call but not over-time hours (Watts & Rich, 1992, p. 298).

Employers' assumption that mothers need time and flexibility to be available for their children, rather than a career or an adequate income to support them, reinforces the idea that mothers are unable to cope with a career job and encourages perceptions of mothers as peripheral employees (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Collinson, Knights & Collinson, 1990; Dipboye & Colella, 2005; Elg & Jonnergard, 2003, pp. 154-161; Lewis, 2000, pp. 49-70; Lewis, 1997, p. 14; Watts & Rich, 1992, pp. 286-308). Where fathers are concerned, the opposite assumption is made: that fathers require a high income and do not need to be available to their children.

In general, the vast majority of the jobs that pay sufficiently well to maintain a family are designed for people who do not have caregiving responsibilities. By contrast, jobs which can be fitted around childcare responsibilities tend not to pay enough to support a household with children. However, employers do tend to regard such jobs as suitable for mothers and so do many mothers themselves when trying to juggle childcare and paid work (Boswell & Jenkins, 1994; Bryson, 1996; Davidson & Bray, 1994, pp. 10-90; Elder & Johnson, 2001; Gatfield, 1996; Glass, 1999, pp. 416-417; Gregory, 2003, pp. 97-106; Liff & Ward, 2001; Reed & Dahlquist, 1994; Reskin & Padavic, 1999, p. 351; Rothwell, 1980, p. 182; Tilly, 1996, pp. 80-187; Wilson, 1998, p. 407; Yeandle, 2001, pp. 149-150).

On the other hand, employers' assumption that mothers of dependent children can participate in paid work on the same terms as men and women without childcare responsibilities ignores the constraints of childcare and similarly discriminates against mothers (Applebaum, 2002; Bailyn, 2003, pp. 170-171). Mothers are able to apply for the better-paid jobs, but if appointed they are then likely to have to work longer than school hours and during school holidays since 'full-time' employment is also longer than school hours and continues during school holidays (Else, 1996, pp. 73-77). In New Zealand, as elsewhere, there is usually no supervision for children before 8.30am and after 4.00pm, and parents with inflexible work schedules need to have

backup childminders. Returners in non-standard employment often do not earn enough to cover such expenses (Holloway, 1999, pp. 438-460). Further, few employers are willing to provide time off for mothers to attend to sick children or cover unexpected school closures (Dex, 1990; Jenkins, 2004).

Employers' assumptions that mothers and fathers have different working time preferences in line with the domestic responsibilities they hold contribute to mothers' lowly paid work position at the back of the job queue (Caputo & Cianni, 2001, p. 311; Crompton & Sanderson, 1990; Fagan & Rubery, 1999, p. 4; Reskin & Roos, 1990; Rose, 2005, pp. 34-35; Williams, 2000, pp. 66-83). Even highly qualified mothers are affected by such assumptions (Barnett, 1999, pp. 143-157; Cassirer & Reskin, 2000, pp 438-458; Gerstel & McGonagle, 1998, pp 510-532; Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, pp. 10-12; Moore, 2004, pp. 210-21; Knights & Richards, 2003; Rider, 2005, p 256-258; Williams, 2000). Mothers in part-time employment, for example, are effectively on a separate and low-level career path and likely to have their careers 'derailed' (Belet, Glorieux & Laurijssen, 2004, pp. 172-176; Blakewell, 2001). Within the USA, strands within occupations that are more 'family friendly', and have attracted relatively large numbers of mothers, are known disparagingly as 'mommy track' jobs, as being on this path is seen as an obstacle to career progression (Blakewell, 2001; Mano-Negrin, 2003, pp. 342-358; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004, pp. 68-70).

Today men/fathers are employed longer hours than women/mothers though both genders are working increasingly long hours (Stredwick & Ellis, 2005, p. 1). In liberal, English-speaking nations such as the USA, the UK and New Zealand, the hours of paid work of 'core' primary workers have grown steadily in recent years (Barrett, 1997, pp. 168-171; Callister, 1998, pp. 101-121; Callister, 2005; Crompton, 2006b, pp. 89-217; Fine-Davis, Fagnani, Giovannini & Clarke, 2004, pp. 133-176; Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005, pp. 171-189; Liff & Ward, 2001; Lewis, 2003; Sigala, 2005, pp. 118-119; Statistics New Zealand, 2001). Employers appear to expect fathers to work longer hours than childless men (Jones & Causer, 1995, pp.51-54). In general, fathers are employed for longer hours than childless men, and fathers dominate the 'career' workforce (Bruegel & Gray, 2005; Jones & Causer, 1995; Williams, 2000, pp. 55-117). By contrast, in New Zealand, as in other industrialised nations, mothers are

still predominantly employed part-time (Budig & England, 2001; McPherson, 2005, pp. 7-20; Miller, 1993, p. 91).

In the EU, research suggests that having children increases the paid work hours of fathers (Fine-Davis, Fagnani, Giovannini & Clarke, 2005, pp. 99-101; Kaufmann & Uhlenberg, 2000). In particular, in the UK, most fathers work longer hours than other men in the EU (MacInnes, 2005, pp. 277-275). By contrast, mothers tend to reduce their hours of paid work or withdraw completely from the labour force while their children are young (Fine-Davis, Fagnani, Giovannini & Clarke, 2005; Giele & Stebbins, 2003, pp. 21-23). Mothers in the UK especially, have fewer hours of paid work (in female-dominated jobs) than in other EU countries (Dex, Walters & Alden, 1993, p. 164). Research estimates that two-thirds of British women who have taken a break for childbearing subsequently return to paid work part-time and this has implications for their pay (Bruegel & Gray, 2005, pp. 148-149).

It can be seen that workplace practices can and do contribute to mothers' lowly position in paid work, contributing to labour market inequities (Budig, 2002; Bussemaker & van Kersbergen, 1994, pp. 18-19; Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 86-136; Else, 1997; Fagan & Rubery, 1999, pp. 8-9; Gelfand, Nishii, Raver & Schneider, 2005, pp. 92-93; Headlee, & Elfin, 1996, p. 6; Perrons, 2003, pp. 129-148; Rose, 2005, pp. 42-43). Employers' under-provision of full-time positions contributes to the involuntary unemployment of mothers (Davidson & Bray, 1994, pp. 31-91; Else, 1996, pp. 56-66; Levenson, 2000, pp. 336-359; Hunter, 2006, p. 285; Patrick, 2006, p. 156; Votivuis, 2006, pp. 265-280).

Many of the jobs that returners have are at the lower end of the wage scale. Workplace practices can be said to disadvantage returners on two fronts. Employers' demand for workers to be 'ideal employees', able to work long hours and on a continuous basis, contributes to returners' interrupted careers and lack of career advancement. Research suggests that continuity of employment is more conducive to career development while part-time work and flexible work negatively affects careers (Crompton, Dennett & Wigfield, 2003, pp. 6-37). Even when good part-time jobs provide better conditions, in general it is full-time employment that holds the key to career progress (Crompton, Dennett & Wigfield, 2003). In particular, the lack of

security and long-term income protection and exclusion of temporary workers from 'normal employment rights' mean returners are largely excluded from equal opportunities in the labour market and current workplace practices perpetuate such inequities (Conley, 2003, pp. 458-475; Fredman, 2006).

Summary and conclusion

Despite the increase in mothers' participation in paid work, labour market equities have not been achieved. In New Zealand, as in most other liberal welfare nations, mothers returning to paid work cluster in low status employment at the back of the job queue. On the whole, women are far less likely than men to be recruited into positions with significant career opportunities, and mothers returning to paid work are even less likely to have such opportunities. Indeed, women who had begun a career before having children are likely to find themselves in dead end jobs at the back of the queue after returning from a 'career break'. Research suggests that mothers are not able to resume careers even decades after returning to paid work.

This chapter has outlined the increase in women's participation in paid work in the latter half of the twentieth century. It noted the increase in the rate of mothers returning to and remaining attached to the paid workforce. The chapter also identified employers' policies and practices as contributing to the occupational downgrading of mothers returning to paid work: returners appear to be the least preferred occupational group and occupy the least preferred jobs at the back of the queue. A long hours paid work culture, for example, disadvantages working mothers in that long hours and seniority are key requirements for career advancement. Mothers who work part-time or stop work altogether risk being seen as less committed workers suitable for non-career positions, perpetuating labour market inequities despite several decades of anti-discrimination and equal employment practices. The following chapter will provide a theoretical perspective on returners' lowly position in the paid work force. The chapter will outline some conceptual models of women and work, and in doing so adapt the job queues/gender queues (Reskin & Roos, 1990) model to depict the processes that confine returners to jobs at the back of the queue.

CHAPTER FOUR: MODELS OF RETURNERS' EMPLOYMENT

Introduction

In the preceding two chapters, I argued that social policy frameworks and labour market processes mediate returners' employment opportunities. In this chapter I look for a good conceptual model to describe the nature and patterns of discrimination against women, in particular mothers returning to paid work. I also provide an explanatory perspective for mothers' lowly labour market position by asking: Who benefits from assigning mothers to the back of the queue? Who would be resistant to change and why?

In the first half of this chapter I describe some of a range of overlapping conceptual models, which illustrate patterns of gender inequality at work. Few models are able to provide a clear depiction of the changing patterns of mothers' employment. On the whole they tend to provide a static and ahistorical view of women/mothers in paid work. However, the concept of job queues/gender queues (Reskin & Roos, 1990), that I adapt to the situation of returners, provides a dynamic descriptive model of how mothers are relegated to the back of the queue and assigned the least desirable jobs with low status and low pay. The precise nature of these jobs changes over time and the model shows how this occurs but not why it occurs.

In the second half of the chapter, I discuss some theoretical ideas as to why women's, and, in particular, mothers' labour continues to be exploited both at home and in the paid workforce. Theoretical explanations of labour market inequities fall into two main groups, one that focuses on individualist characteristics, and another that focuses on structural barriers (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990; Tomlinson, 2006a, pp. 66-83; Crompton, 2006b). Individualist explanations emphasise personal choice and preference as key determinants of women's employment. Structural explanations, however, illustrate the barriers facing women as a group including gender relations and the national policy context, as indicated in the previous two chapters (Crompton, 2006, pp. 253-268; Le Feuvre & Andriocci, 2005, pp. 14-43; Roos & Gatta, 1999, pp. 95-120; Tomlinson, 2006, pp. 1-18). My main focus will be on structural explanations that satisfactorily account for the position of returners.

Conceptualising returners' employment position

Labour market segmentation models have been used to explain how men and women are channelled into different sectors of the labour market. These theories assume that the labour market is divided into segments, that the pay and conditions of work vary between segments, and that the characteristics of the workers in those segments also vary, for example by gender. Segmentation theories, which take a variety of forms, are useful to describe gender segregation in terms of status and wage differentials in particular sectors of the labour market (Peck, 1996, p.47; Roos & Gatta, 1999, p. 111).

Occupational segregation by gender: horizontal segregation

One way in which feminists have depicted the position of women at work is through the concept of horizontal and vertical occupational segregation. Horizontal occupational segregation refers to the way that women and men dominate different occupations. In general, women are clustered into a much narrower range of jobs than men, such as clerical, retail, nursing, teaching and social work (Acker, 1999; Adkins, 1995, pp. 108-160; Anker, 2001, p. 158; OECD, 1998b; Purcell, 2000, p. 120; Robinson, 2001, p. 158; Wallace, 1999). This 'crowding' of women into a relatively narrow range of jobs has been used as one explanation of women's lower pay (Adams, 2005, pp. 73-91; Hogue & Kirkpatrick, 2003, pp. 684-685; Walters & Dex, 1992) suggesting that occupational segregation is both a cause and an effect of women's disadvantage in the labour markets (Burchell, 1996, p. 227).

Vertical segregation

Vertical occupational segregation by gender refers to the way that men dominate top occupational positions, whilst women are clustered in the more junior positions (Hakim, 1996; and 2004, pp. 46-157). Terms such as 'glass ceiling' (the invisible barrier preventing women from reaching the top hierarchy of organisations), and 'sticky door' (referring to the predominance of clerical workers at the bottom of the occupational ladder) have been used to refer to the barriers that women face in paid employment (Headlee & Elfin, 1996, pp. 18-19; Littlewood, 2004, pp. 128-129; Petersen & Meyersson, 1999, p. 199). In addition, mothers are said to face a 'maternal wall' where they return to and stay in jobs that are less desirable and with fewer

rewards than those that they had before children (Williams, 2000, pp. 69-70; Williams, 2005, pp. 91-101).

Women (particularly mothers) have fewer choices of jobs, and, on average, are less mobile than men (Adams, 2005; Bolle, 2001, pp. 224-228; Budig, 2002, pp. 261-275; Burton, 1992, p. 194; Cassirer & Reskin, 2000, pp. 440-459; Grant & Tancred, 1992, p. 135; Felmler, 1995, p. 183; Jacobs, 1999, pp. 32-45; OECD, 1998, pp. 193-195; Padavic & Reskin, 2002, pp. 99-112; Tam, 1997, pp. 240-243; Tomlinson, Olsen, Neff & Purdam & Mehta, 2005, pp. 56-59; Williams, 2000). In particular, mothers' part-time employment negatively affects opportunities for upward mobility (Petersen & Meyersson, 2000, p. 253; Tomlinson, 2004 and 2005). By contrast, men (especially fathers) are more likely to be in occupations with opportunities for promotion, to be promoted and to hold positions of authority. Male employees are promoted more quickly than female employees even in female-dominated occupations, a phenomenon referred to as the 'glass escalator' (Padovic & Reskin, 2002, pp. 98-119).

The horizontal and vertical occupational segregation of mothers and fathers is more pronounced than that between men and women in general. Childfree women, and mothers who take very short breaks after the birth of children, tend to be in higher paid and higher status jobs at the head of the queue, and are more likely to achieve a linear, upwardly mobile career, than mothers who take longer breaks (Irwin & Bottero, 2000, p. 274; Jacobs, 1999, p. 43). However, on average, women (including childfree women) tend to get the least desirable jobs (D. D. Bielby, 1999; Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 81-83; Jones & Causer, 1995, p. 51; OECD, 1998, pp. 9-42; Perna, 2005, pp. 5-7). Of the four groups of workers (mothers, non-mothers, fathers, and non-fathers) mothers returning to the paid workforce are the least preferred occupational group, and are offered the worst jobs at the back of the queue.

The gender and occupational gaps are wider in liberal nations than in social democratic nations (Anttonen, 2005, pp. 90-99; Persson & Jonung, 1998). As indicated in Chapter Three, liberal nations allow relative freedom of the market, which means that it is easier for employers to discriminate on the grounds of gender, parenthood, class or ethnicity. Social democratic nations, however, have more legislation to promote gender equality at work, and this contributes to the better

position of returners in these countries. Nevertheless, even in such nations true equality has not been achieved, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Gender segregation, both horizontal and vertical, is a persistent feature of the labour market. However, recent research suggests there have been some shifts in vertical and horizontal segregation as more women enter higher-level management (Hyman, 2004, p.11; Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2006, pp. 584-586). And more women enter traditionally male occupations such as law, medicine and dentistry (Adams, 2005, p. 72). Nevertheless, women are still more likely to be in middle rather than top-level management (Hess-Biber & Carter, 2005, pp. 73-75; White, 1992). As discussed in Chapter Three, even mothers who started out in traditionally male-dominated, full-time employment face occupational downgrading in part-time ('mommy track') jobs after having children (Blakewell, 2002, p. 166; Joshi, 1992, pp. 116-117).

External and internal labour markets

Another model, the internal and external labour market model, suggests that the labour market is divided into two sectors, and the internal sector works differently from the external sector. This is similar to the notion of core and peripheral sectors, linked with size of organisations. Individuals' access to jobs and earnings depend on whether they can enter the internal or core labour market. Only certain sectors of the labour market have internal labour market entry points, but once hired, workers are protected from external competition (Roos & Gatta, 1999, p. 111). Individuals (mothers who take employment breaks, for example) who experience difficulty in gaining access to the internal or core labour market have limited opportunities for career type jobs.

Employers in the internal or core sector prefer white, middle class males, especially fathers, perceiving them as a more stable labour force. Jobs in this sector are more likely to have career progress. Such jobs include opportunities for on-the-job-training and opportunities for multi-skills: in this sense, flexibility is termed functional flexibility since such training is more easily transferable and so encourages upward career trajectory (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990b; Peck, 1996; Stone, 2006, pp. 246-247). However, in the external or peripheral sector, there is less emphasis on training: the jobs offered are seen as jobs requiring no or low skills. Where training is

provided, it is typically basic and of short duration. Workers in this sector are hired and let go according to fluctuating demands and there is contingent rather than functional flexibility (Casey, Metcalf & Milward, 1997; Maruani, 1998, pp. 8-11; Tomlinson, 2006c, pp. 986-590). Such jobs have no or only short career ladders and women dominate these jobs, illustrating the gendered nature of flexible work (Stone, 2006, pp. 249-250).

Primary/secondary labour markets

A related model is the primary and secondary labour market model. As with the internal/external labour market model, in this version the labour market is viewed as consisting of primary and secondary sectors (Baron & Norris, 1976). The primary sector comprises jobs with formal skill levels that are technologically advanced and have clear career ladders (bureaucratic career model). By contrast, the secondary sector comprises least desirable jobs with low status, low pay and poor working conditions (Barron and Norris, 1976; Peck, 1996, p. 51).

Men (especially, white, middle class fathers) predominate in the primary labour market, and women in the secondary one (Barron & Norris, 1976; Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Reimer, 2003, pp. 112-113). Employers use the secondary sector as a 'safety valve'. When there is growth in the economy, employers recruit from the labour supply in the secondary labour market (allowing some women and minorities access to better jobs further up the job queue). At other times, employees from the primary sector may be subcontracted to the secondary sector. However, positions thus created tend to be temporary (Peck, 1996, pp. 51-52).

In all these models white men as a group have better access to the best jobs at the head of the queue. These jobs have career progress, high status and pay as well as autonomy and levels of authority. In contrast, women especially mothers are more likely to be channelled into the less desirable jobs at the back of the queue, with low pay and status, high insecurity and no career opportunities.

Labour market segmentation and returners

Employers' strategies have been found to contribute to labour market fragmentation (Reimer, 2003, pp. 110-128). Workers in the secondary sector (smaller workplaces)

generally have less union representation and weaker bargaining power, and employers' preference for men reinforces this inequity (Davidson & Bray, 1994, p. 90; Peck, 1996, pp. 69-72; Stone, 2006, pp. 246-247). As indicated in Chapter Two, returners dominate the secondary/peripheral/external sector of the labour market. Indeed, women who may have been part of the core (full-time, permanent career) work force before having children frequently find that even without changing their employer, they are likely to become peripheral workers when they return from time away having children. A study of British returners, for example, found that returners had fewer opportunities for jobs in the internal labour market (Felmlee, 1995, pp. 170-184).

To an extent, segmentation models can contribute to a description of mothers' paid work position. Returners are often recruited into part-time employment as a peripheral workforce to support the core (full-time) workforce (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Tilly, 1996; Watts & Rich, 1992, p. 296). These mothers provide employers with a flexible and relatively cheap but often (highly) qualified labour force (Usui & Colignon, 1996, p. 559). Mothers who take career breaks for children also lose contacts with work-related networks, essential to enter the internal labour market (Hanson & Pratt, 1995; Marini & Fan, 1997, p. 602; Munch, McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1997, p. 518; Noonan, 2001, pp. 1135-1136; Reimer, 2003, pp. 118-125; Stone, 2006, pp. 249-259).

The idea of a segmented labour market helps to illustrate how men/fathers are given the best jobs at the head of the queue in the internal labour market. Women as a group have limited access to the internal or core sectors, and so have limited access to promotions, and mothers returning to paid work have even fewer opportunities (Roos & Gatta, 1999, pp. 111-112). As indicated in Chapter Two, employers' assumptions about mothers' need for flexibility to accommodate childcare contribute to the creation of part-time employment to entice mothers into low status jobs at the back of the job queue (Caputo & Cianni, 2001). In World War Two in Britain, part-time jobs were deliberately created to enable mothers to participate in paid work, while also being the primary childcare givers (Briar, 1992).

Motherhood is seldom associated with positions of power, prestige and authority (Dex & Joshi, 1999; Elg & Jonnergard, 2003; Padovic & Reskin, 2002, pp. 116-117). While EEO and anti-discrimination legislation has made it illegal to fire workers who

are hired last, even such legislation cannot always protect disadvantaged workers (Reskin & Roos, 1990, p. 34; Sanders & Reed, 1982, p. 84). Most employers can get around the legislation by reclassifying jobs or creating jobs for women/mothers at lower levels (Tomaskovic-Devey & Skaggs, 1999, pp. 153-167).

However, one of the major problems with all the conceptualisations described above is that they are simplistic, static and ahistorical (Roos & Gatta, 1999, p. 112). They fail to adequately portray the dynamism of the labour market. In particular, to an extent women's determined attempts to enter a wider range of previously male-dominated jobs with better pay, status and prospects have often been successful (Walby, 1990). Women have not only entered but also come to numerically dominate some jobs that used to be male preserves, especially clerical and administrative work. Other occupations, such as teaching are becoming feminised at present. It might be expected that the entry of women/mothers into occupations such as real estate, law, pharmacy and medicine (Padavic & Reskin, 2002) would have reduced gender segregation and inequality at work, and improved women/mothers' pay and prospects. This, however, has not happened. While anti-discrimination and equal employment opportunities legislation, together with flatter organisational structures, have enabled more mothers to return and remain attached to the labour market, other subtle but intractable barriers (indirect discrimination) remain (Acker & van Houton, 1992, pp. 16-27; Stone, 2006, p. 259).

Instead, a dynamic pattern has emerged where the influx of women/mothers into formerly male dominated jobs is accompanied by loss of pay, status and prospects in those occupations, so that entire occupations are devalued by the presence of large numbers of women (Reid, 1998, p. 530; Uttal, 2002, p. 111). Re-segregation from predominantly male to predominantly female workers then occurs in such occupations (Reskin & Roos, 1990). Using 14 case studies of feminising occupations, Reskin and Roos (1990) were able to provide a more dynamic model that more accurately describes the gender segregation of the labour market.

Job queues and gender queues

Here I outline Reskin and Roos' concept of job and gender queues to explain how employers allocate jobs and constantly recreate gender divisions in the labour market.

Although Reskin and Roos used the model to conceptualise the position of all women in the labour market, I suggest the model can be adapted so that it takes account of the positions in the queue of various groups of women. Mothers fare worse than women without children. Older workers, especially older women with children, are even less attractive to employers. Further, women of colour, especially those with children, are especially likely to be at the back of the queue for the most desirable jobs. At its best, the concept of job queues, can provide a dynamic picture of how mothers returning to paid work are relegated to the lowest ranks and offered the least desirable jobs.

Reskin and Roos argue that employers use a queuing system to allocate jobs. This simply means that employers rank groups of potential workers based on their own preferences, thus creating labour queues. Workers, too, rank potential jobs based on attractiveness, creating job queues. Men and women have similar ideas of what they see as a good job, namely one with good pay, prospects, security, and where the work itself is seen as interesting and worthwhile. However, employers prefer men and offer them the more desirable jobs. This means that only the less attractive jobs are made available to women. This is why women are found in a smaller range of female-dominated occupations with lower wages. This accounts for the predominance of men in the best jobs located at the head of the queue, and the predominance of women in less desirable jobs and positions at the back of the queue (Reskin & Roos, 1990, pp. 30-39). Being at the back of the queue is associated with lower social status, and mothers are further back in the queue than childfree women.

However, women are not passive in this process. Women continually attempt, sometimes successfully, to gain access to the better jobs occupied primarily by men. Employers find that women can be employed to perform these jobs well, and more cheaply than men. However, Reskin & Roos argue that as jobs become feminised, men lose interest in them. Employers then reduce the pay and status in these jobs, and men lose further interest in such jobs (1990, pp. 303-305). Women and ethnic minorities, however, move into the positions that men vacate, since they still represent better jobs for them (Reskin & Roos, 1990, p. 349). A study of American human resource personnel, for example, suggested that men found human resource jobs less attractive when the tasks shifted from masculine functions, such as labour relations, to tasks requiring 'people' skills (Manley & Roos, 1999, pp. 173-194). Other examples

can be seen in the feminisation of jobs such as printing, pharmacy, medicine, accountancy, law, real estate and insurance (Padavic & Reskin, 2002; Reskin & Roos, 1990, pp. 63-304). More recently, in some feminising occupations such as academia, men/fathers are over-represented in senior positions, while women/mothers are over-represented in junior positions, such as clerical jobs and tutorships (Ferber & Nelson, 1999; Finch, 2003, pp. 133-134).

The job queues model also works in terms of the whole labour market, as well as specific occupations. In times of labour shortages, occupational growth, deskilling, and reduced discrimination against women, employers rank women further up the queue, so that more women are able to enter better (male-dominated) occupations (Roos & Gatta, 1999, p. 112). Examples of such instances can be found during the two World Wars, in places such as the UK, the USA, and New Zealand, as discussed in Chapter Three (Braybon, 1981; Braybon & Summerfield, 1987; Gustafsson & Stafford, 1997, p. 153; Nolan, 2000; Summerfield, 1984). However, mothers were the last to be called into employment. In the UK, mothers of children under 14 were only called up only at the height of the labour shortage, in 1943, and then only into part-time employment (Briar, 1997).

The job queues gender/queues model shows that employers' preferences and actions play a significant part in the persistent gender segregation in the paid workforce. Firstly, instead of becoming integrated, women are clustered in female-dominated positions with lower pay and status (Reskin & Roos, 1990, pp. 70-79; Manley & Roos, 1999; Roos & Gatta, 1999). Whilst a few women (typically women without children) reach senior positions in the male dominated sections of occupations, mothers are more likely to be found in low status and part-time occupations. The positions into which women are recruited are more likely to be jobs with no opportunities for career progress.

The next section examines the unequal treatment of mothers and fathers in the gender queues in greater detail.

Returners' employment position

Conceptualising returners' paid work situation as a job queue and gender queue allows the processes of mothers' relegation to the back of the queue to become visible. Job queues and gender queues suggest that workers high up in the queue can access top jobs and show how returners, as low-ranked workers, must then occupy the less desirable positions (Reskin & Padavic, 1999, p. 354). Mothers returning from career breaks for children are frequently assigned the least desirable jobs; they have lower access to economic resources and are often worse off than non-mothers, and much worse off than fathers (Baron & Bielby, 1982, p. 185; Irwin & Bottero, 2000, p. 277; Kelsey, 1993; McKie, Gregory & Bowlby, 2002, p. 901; Williams, 1993).

Employers in the primary labour market are said to prefer men because they can perform as workers who are able to fulfil the terms and conditions of full-time employment, in particular time commitment and employment continuity (Bailyn, 2003, p 139; Lewis & Haas, 2005, pp. 349-350; Moen, 1992, pp. 3-8; Williams, 2000). As discussed in Chapter Two, fathers are more able than mothers to perform as full-time (ideal) employees who are committed to continuous employment. Mothers, because of the unequal division of childcare responsibility, are constrained (or seen as constrained) to part-time and short hours employment. Employers' assumptions about the domestic division of labour, and their creation of part-time and other non-standard employment, however, help to make this a reality.

It appears that fathers are more likely to be at the head of the gender queues than single and childfree men. Fathers are less likely than single and childfree men to be unemployed. They also earn more and have longer hours of paid work on average. Fathers in the primary labour market are able to maintain their status and pay (Peck, 1996). Employers' recruitment of mothers into the secondary sector (discussed in Chapter Two) reduces mothers' access to the better jobs in the primary labour market (Briar, 1997, p. 171; Cousins & Tang, 2004, pp. 530-545; Dale, 1987, pp. 330-331; Davidson & Bray, 1994, pp. 29-30; Pierson, 1991, pp. 71-79). In general mothers have been further back in the queue in terms of pay, status, prospects and security than single and childfree women.

It is mothers who tend to be offered the jobs that men and some childfree women do not want (Dex & Joshi, 1999). Despite changes in attitudes and in the social and economic infrastructure that have made it easier for women to be in paid work, barriers against mothers' employment higher up the queue remain persistent (Dale, 1990; Fagan & Rubery, 1999, pp. 8-9; Rose, 2005, pp. 42-43). Further, when male-dominated occupations feminise, as in pharmacy and medicine, mothers are concentrated in lower status, female-dominated sectors (Blakewell, 2002, p. 158). In medicine, for instance, mothers tend to be in obstetrics and general practice; in law, mothers tend to specialise in family law; and in dentistry, few women with childcare responsibilities are in private, sole owner practice. On the whole, mothers in such professions earn less and are concentrated in lower ranks than their male counterparts (Adams, 2005, pp. 73-91). In some countries such as the UK, mothers (especially less qualified mothers) returning to service occupations tend to work shorter hours after childbirth and have limited upward mobility (Tomlinson, 2006a).

So who benefits from allocating mothers to the back of the job and gender queues? Why do employers continually find ways of discriminating between men and women, and even more between mothers and fathers? In the following section, I outline some theoretical explanations for this dynamic gendered division in the workforce. I begin with theories that explain women's position in general, before adapting such explanations to the position of mothers returning to paid work.

Explaining mothers' position in the job queues

It is clear that there is a pattern over time of employers preferring men for the best jobs. While various theories have been developed to explain labour market inequities, each theory can only provide a partial explanation. Different theories are needed to fully comprehend the various factors involved (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990).

The task of this half of the chapter is to explore who benefits from relegating returners to the back of the queue, since groups who benefit would potentially want to maintain the status quo, thus contributing to the persistence of labour market inequities (Bryson, 1992). This section first looks at theories that seek to explain the exploitation of women in general.

Capitalism benefits

Marxist and neo-liberal theories are generally in opposition to one another (Briar, 1992). However, they have one major feature in common, in that they both assume that the poorly paid, insecure and lowly status of women/mothers in the paid work force is of benefit to capitalism. They disagree as to whether this is beneficial to all of society. Marxist theorists would generally regard mothers' exploitation as harmful to mothers themselves, to their children and to large sections of society. By contrast, neo-liberal writers have seen the disadvantaged position of mothers at work as beneficial to business, and hence to all of society (Briar, 1997).

Human Capital Theories: rational choice/specialisation

Neo-classical and human capital theories suggest that society as a whole benefits from the 'rational choices' made by men/fathers and women/mothers. Such theories link mothers' position in paid work with individual characteristics and preferences. A basic assumption of the theory is the rationality of individuals (and individual families) in maximizing benefits for the household (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990). It is argued that mothers, because of their better nurturing abilities, specialise in family work, while fathers specialise in paid work. It is argued that men/fathers are paid more and are found at the head of the queue because they are worth more to employers, since they are more likely to invest in human capital (education, training or paid work experiences) (Becker, 1981).

Mothers' position at the back of the queue has been rationalised in various ways. It has been argued that mothers and women who intend to become mothers invest less in education and work-related experiences. Secondly, women, especially mothers, are said to have other non-work demands on their time, and can thus expend less energy on paid work (Becker, 1985). Thirdly, it is claimed that women who plan to have children choose occupations that do not require firm-specific skills, but allow fewer penalties for labour market interruptions. Since firm-specific training tends to be employer-funded, it is further suggested that employers are reluctant to train women because of their tendency to take employment breaks for childbearing and rearing. Finally, it is argued that mothers who take employment breaks suffer skill deterioration (Anker, 2001, pp. 136-138; Blau, 1998, pp. 16-17; Williams, 1998, pp. 48-49).

However, these arguments have been criticised on various grounds. Firstly, female-dominated occupations are not easier to exit and enter than male-dominated occupations (Correll, 2004, pp. 94-111; Padavic & Reskin, 2002). It has also been found that female-dominated jobs do not necessarily require less human capital in terms of education, training, qualifications and experience, but are nevertheless lower paid. In addition, single women are just as likely to be in female-dominated jobs as are married women/mothers (Reskin & Padavic, 1999, p. 351). The low pay in these occupations therefore cannot be explained by the demands of motherhood.

Further, research suggests that employment breaks do not necessarily lead to loss of skills, since most mothers do not take long enough employment breaks to result in long-term loss of skills (Joesch, 1998; Rimmer & Rimmer, 1997; Roos & Gatta, 1999, p. 109). In addition, it has been found that when in paid work, men and women expend equivalent effort in a job (Roos & Gatta, 1999, p. 109). In fact, it has been found that after accounting for the time that women/mothers spend on unpaid (family) work, women/mothers still expend more energy on their paid jobs than men/fathers do (Reskin & Padavic, 1999, p. 351).

While there is some support for human capital theories, they do not account for all labour market inequities (Elliott, Dale & Egerton, 2001; Estes & Glass, 1996, pp. 405-443; Blakewell, 2001, pp. 147-148; Walby, 1990, pp. 25-59; Padavic & Reskin, 2002, pp. 53-55). In New Zealand, for example, research suggests that during 1986-1996, the participation rate of women aged 25-34 (years often associated with motherhood) and 35-64 (years associated with returning) for those with post-school qualifications, increased while the participation rate of women aged 25-34 with only school or no qualifications actually declined (Dixon, 1996, pp. 82-83). In the UK, in the 1980s it was suggested that mothers' lack of qualifications and skills posed substantial barriers to mothers' re-entry to paid work (Bird & West, 1987, pp.181-182; Dex & Joshi, 1999, p. 643). More recently, it has been found that returners with no qualifications tended to stay at home longer. By contrast, highly qualified mothers tended to stay in paid work longer and to return sooner after childbirth (Joshi & Hinde, 1993, pp. 209-210). This is likely to be because they can earn more (perhaps enough to offset the costs of childcare), and have better long-term career prospects (Madden, 2004, pp. 9-14).

Nevertheless, increased female qualifications appear to account for only 30-50 percent of the reduction in the gender pay gap (Padavic & Reskin, 2002). Recent research increasingly suggests that qualifications alone are not enough to ensure re-entry into a career job. In general, the average female employee is now more educated than the average male employee in most industrialised countries (Jackson, 1991, p. 98). In particular, women/mothers in New Zealand (Dixon, 2000; OECD, 2004, pp. 59-62), Sweden (Moore, 2004, p. 208) and the USA (Badgett & Folbre, 2001, p. 337; Coltrane, 2004, p. 217) are more likely to complete tertiary education than are men; but employment is still highly segregated by gender, both horizontally and vertically (Statistics New Zealand, 2001; Hand & Hughes, 2004, p. 46), and the gender pay gap still remain (OECD, 2003; Hyman, 2004).

Increasing female educational/vocational qualifications and growing numbers of mothers in higher paid male-dominated occupations do not appear to bring about pay equity. In most liberal nations, including New Zealand and the UK, the gender pay gap, reduced in the 1970s, has widened again in recent years (Fagan & Rubbery, 1999, pp. 26-27; Ginn, Street & Arber, 2001, pp. 20-21; Gordon & Morton, 2001; Hyman, 2004; OECD, 2006, pp. 38-40; Shirley & Wallace, 2004, p. 686; Whitehouse, Zetlin and Eamshaw, 2001).

In New Zealand, as in other liberal welfare nations, even highly qualified mothers still face barriers to entering and rising within male-dominated occupations (Gordon & Morton, 2001; Padavic & Reskin, 2002, pp. 58-89; Statistics New Zealand, 2005). In addition, even women who have remained single and have continuity in employment are worse off than men in terms of pay, career advancement and work conditions (Badgetts & Folbre, 2001, pp. 337-338; Melkas & Anker, 2001, pp. 198-211; Padavic & Reskin, 2002, pp. 58-89). This undermines the view that mothers have less human capital to offer.

Human capital assumptions that individuals' 'rational choices' benefit society at large ignores the fact that the benefits of these choices are unevenly spread. These supposedly rational and altruistic choices ignore the sacrifices (loss of earnings and career) that mothers make in 'choosing' unpaid childcare (Briar, 1997, p. 167; Hyman, 1994; Risman & Ferree, 1995; Williams, 2000). Having children is seen as an

irrational choice (Bunkle, 1992). Such a view also ignores the power balance in households that mediates and limits the 'choices' available to mothers (Fenstermaker, 2002, pp.106-107; Hobson, 1997, p. 35; Luxton, 1986, pp. 43-51; Meulders, Plasman & Stricht, 1993, pp. 14-147; Pasqua, 2005, pp. 202-203; Presser, 1994, pp. 348-363; Sperling & Owen, 2000; Vianello, 2003; Williams, 2000, pp. 55-117).

Marxist debates

Traditional Marxist explanations claim that women's oppression is a consequence of the capitalist production method (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990, p. 3). In the 1970s-1980s, the key discussions centred on the 'domestic labour' debate and the 'reserve army of labour' debate (Acker, 1989, p. 237; Barrett, 1980, pp. 210-251; Beechey, 1988, pp. 47-50; Bruegel, 1979; Daune-Richard, 1988, pp. 261-264).

Some feminist writers argued that married women form a latent reserve army of labour to be recruited in times of labour shortage and dismissed when the economy is slack (Beechey, 1986; Connelly & MacDonald, 1986, pp. 53-78; Pierson, 1986, pp. 102-110; Ruggie, 1988, p. 185;). However, there was a lack of empirical support to suggest that women were used in this way (Bryson, 2003, pp. 206-208; Walby, 1990, pp. 35-37). Capitalism did not seem to take advantage of the opportunity for hiring cheap female labour to replace male labour (Walby, 1986).

The 'reserve army of labour' debate tried to show that the reason women were at the back of the job queue was that female workers (especially mothers at home) were used in the same way as unemployed men had been, to keep down the wages of employed men (Marx, 1954). That is, women with family responsibilities could be drawn into paid work if a tight labour market started to cause male wages to rise. Mothers could be brought in to undermine any gains in male wages. In general, however, employers did not use women in this way.

While it is true that mothers are more likely to obtain paid work at times of labour shortage, employers do not use mothers interchangeably with male workers, as they would with unemployed men. For example, when women have been brought into 'men's jobs' such as engineering, as in wartime, this has been usually done in ways where they could be removed when men returned to these jobs. The UK Restoration

of Pre-war Practices Acts, for example, were based on agreements made prior to the widespread recruitment of women into engineering, to reassure the men that women were only temporary workers (Briar, 1997). Similarly, in Australia during the 1972-1973 labour shortage, trade unions pressured the Australian government to recruit more women/mothers, but with the tacit understanding that they would go home when the labour market eased (Cook, 1978, p. 40).

The reserve army of labour debate also failed to take account of the fact that occupational segregation creates separate labour markets for men and women. For example, during the 1980s in the UK, there was high male unemployment, whilst female employment was increasing. However, women were being recruited almost entirely into low status jobs that men would have refused (Beechey, 1988, pp. 48-49; Bruegel, 1996).

Some feminist writers have therefore argued that the reserve army of labour debate was essentially gender-blind (Beechey, 1988, pp. 47-59; Crompton & Sanderson, 1990, pp. 6-7). The debates could not prove that capitalism benefited from women/mothers' lowly position, any more than if men/fathers were assigned the bulk of domestic labour and had access only to low paid, low status jobs (Barrett, 1980. pp. 26-27; Briar, 1997, p. 168-169; Crompton & Sanderson, 1990, p. 29). One problem with both liberal and Marxist debates is that they are unable to convincingly show why, since women/mothers are on average cheaper to employ than men/fathers, employers do not consistently prefer women/mothers as workers rather than men/fathers.

Women benefit: Preference Theory

Neo-liberal theories seeking to explain mothers' position in paid work draw upon the notion of lifestyle choices as benefiting women. Some liberal theorists, for instance, argue that mothers deliberately choose low paid, dead end jobs at the back of the queue to allow them to spend more time with their children (Hakim, 1996, p. 81; Hakim, 2004). Hakim's Preference Theory (2000), for instance, suggests women can be divided into three main groups: home/family centred, work-centred, and adapters/drifters. Family-centred women prioritise family over paid work, and work-

centred women prioritise paid work over family. Adapters (the majority) are women who combine both paid work and family and are most responsive to social policy.

However, choice arguments not only place blame on the mothers who are on the receiving end of discriminatory employment practices, but also ignore the substantial barriers limiting a mother's access to a career (Brannen, Moss & Mooney, 2004, pp. 74-75; Crompton, 2006, pp. 255-261; Dooreward, Hendrickx & Verschuren, 2004; Drobnic, Blossfield & Rohwer, 1999, pp. 133-144; Folbre, 1994, pp. 18-20; Ginn et al., 1996; McRae, 1993, 2003; Siltanen, 1994, pp. 148-182; Williams, 2000). Preference theory suggests that mothers (irrationally) choose to be in jobs that disadvantage them (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, pp. 86-87). In practice, mothers' choices are made in the context of real-life possibilities without the support and privileges available to male and some childfree female workers (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Reskin & Roos, 1990, Collinson, Knight & Collinson, 1990; Williams, 2000, p. 6). Personal preferences are also influenced by habit, low expectations and unjust background conditions (Crompton, 2006, p. 256). Further, choices are made within specific cultural and geographical constraints as well as the prevailing social policy frameworks (Crompton & Harris, 1998; McRae, 2003; Tomlinson, 2006).

As indicated in the previous chapter, where state provisions have been generous in support of women's employment, as in socialist democratic Scandinavia, for example, the gender gap in labour force participation rate has considerably reduced (Daly & Rake, 2003, pp. 66-67; Gustafsson & Stafford, 1997, pp. 152-155; Ronsen & Sundstrom, 1997, pp. 159-175). In countries where social policies create quality childcare and more equal job opportunities, mothers' employment has been very high (Borchorst & Siim, 1992, p. 146; OECD, 2003). This indicates that mothers do not consciously 'choose' low status and low paid occupations (Desai & Waite, 1991, pp. 552-553). In fact it has been found that men and women prefer similar types of work (Bryson, 1992, and 1996).

It is clear that the location of mothers in the least desirable positions in paid work cannot be convincingly explained in terms of either the benefits to capitalism, or the benefits to women themselves. Could it be that men, as a group, benefit from mothers' lowly paid work position? A range of feminist writers have pointed to the

benefits to men of the placing of women, especially mothers, at the back of the job queue. These writers have been classified as radical feminists, socialist feminists and materialist feminists.

Men as a group benefit

Radical feminism links women's oppression to patriarchy, or men's domination over women, and suggests that men in general benefit from the exploitation of women (Briar, 1997, p. 169; Crompton & Sanderson, 1990, p. 15). Radical feminists, in particular Catherine MacKinnon, have viewed gender divisions at work as more important than class or ethnicity (MacKinnon, 1987). They view sexuality as the linchpin of gender inequality.

Radical feminists see male power as systemic and endemic, leading to men's privileged position (MacKinnon, 1989; Millet, 1971, pp. 113-127). However, there are few radical feminist discussions of women's economic position, especially explanations for the exploitation of women in paid work. One exception is the work of Catherine MacKinnon (1979), whose early work on sexual harassment of working women made a major contribution to the field of gender and employment. Further, radical feminists have been criticised for a lack of focus on discrimination in the workplace and the gendered nature of the welfare state (Briar, 1997, pp. 169-170; Pierson, 1991, p. 71; Reskin & Padavic, 1999, pp. 353-365).

Nevertheless, radical feminists have made a vital contribution to debates on women and work, which has been extensively drawn upon by socialist and materialist feminists. Unlike liberal feminists, they recognise the way in which gender divisions and gender inequality (including gender discrimination at work) are continually reproduced. Unlike Marxist feminists, they understand the benefits to men of women's subordination in paid and unpaid work. It has been radical feminist analysis that has brought the term patriarchy into widespread use, and made it clear that it is patriarchal social relations, not just capitalism, that explains mothers' position at the back of the queue (Walby, 1990).

Dual systems theory

Socialist and materialist feminist writers recognise the significance of mothers' contribution to production in providing unpaid childcare and domestic labour, and in maintaining and reproducing the labour force. They also recognise that removing capitalism alone is not enough to end the exploitation of women/mothers (Chafetz, 1999, pp. 9-10). It is argued that both capitalism and patriarchy (dual-systems) contribute to the exploitation of women, so that men, both as husbands and workers, benefit from women's unpaid and low paid labour (Hartman, 1981; Rees, 1992, p.23).

A dual-systems approach argues that a capitalist production system exploits working men/fathers and women/mothers differently. Working men, though subordinate to their employers, are permitted to dominate women in paid employment, where they can use sexual harassment to exclude women from certain jobs or encourage women to quit paid work (Briar, 1997, pp. 169-170; MacKinnon, 1979, 1989; Padavic & Reskin, 2002). This has been assisted by the collusion of male trade unions and employers (and also the state, as in the two World Wars) (Briar, 1997, p. 170; Cockburn, 1991, p. 62; Walby, 1990).

At the same time, patriarchal structures have allowed men to exploit the unpaid labour of wives at home (Ferguson & Folbre, 1981, pp. 314-334; Hartmann, 1981, pp. 5-29, and 1984, pp. 259-260). According to some feminist writers, the work contract presupposes the marriage contract, or sexual contract, where the marriage contract is posited as a work contract, under which a man has first call on his wife's services (Delphy, 1984; Pateman, 1989; Walby, 1986, pp. 52-54). The marriage contract often appears to outweigh the employment contract, since a high proportion of employed mothers have to reduce their paid work to make time for doing most of the caring jobs (Hochschild, 1997). This (male) advantage continues beyond marriage, since divorced mothers usually continue to provide the care of children (Delphy, 1984; Williams, 2000).

A sexual contract is also implicit in the employment contracts of some mothers especially in service occupations (Adkins, 1995, pp. 102-230; Tollich & Briar, 1999) since unlike men/fathers, women/mothers, as gendered workers, do not own their workplace identities in the way that men can and do (Adkins, 1995; Adkins & Lury,

1996, pp. 213-222). That is, women/mothers are expected to behave in particular gender-stereotyped ways as part of their job. This can include a sexualised image at work (wearing revealing clothing, or flirting with customers) or portraying a motherly image, or performing more emotional labour than other groups of employees (Adkins, 1995; De Vault, 1999; Hochschild, 1983; Tollich & Briar, 1999). On average, wives are more likely to support spouses' careers at the expense of their own careers and women's work, in particular clerical work, is designed to support male co-workers (Gottlieb, Kelloway & Barnham, 1998).

However, there are no reasons (beyond breastfeeding) why employers should not have mothers as their core workforce, whilst fathers have the main responsibility for home and the well-being of children. There have been times and places where this has occurred: for example, in the cotton weaving mills of East Lancashire in the 19th century and early 20th century, and the jute mills of Dundee, where the women were core workers and the men more peripheral and contingent (Briar, 1997). As Walby (1986) has rightly asked, since women are cheaper, why do employers not prefer them to men all the time? More specifically, why do employers prefer to keep fathers at the head of the queue and mothers at the back of the queue for the best jobs?

The majority of employers are men, who have an interest in maintaining the male-dominated social order that places them at the top of the hierarchy. Employers are said to benefit from gains in reputation and social standing from employing male workers who share similar characteristics to them, a situation that Kanter has termed "homo-sociality" (Kanter, 1987). Employers also benefit from the total commitment of husbands with wives to take care of them and their children, thus freeing them for long paid work hours and continuous employment (Hartmann, 1978 pp, 346-354; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004, p.82). Employers appear to place fathers of young children in jobs that require long hours, while offering wives and mothers low paid and/or short-hours jobs (Levenson, 2000, pp. 336-359; Edwards & Wacjman, 2005, pp. 78-79; Littlewood, 2004, pp. 128-133). By placing mothers in low status and low paid jobs, employers are also able to save costs.

It can be seen, then, that men as husbands, fathers, employees and employers stand to benefit from workplace structures that privilege them; men have a vested interest in

keeping women, especially mothers, in lower status employment, and would be reluctant to change the status quo (Bryson, 2003, pp. 174-188; Crompton & Sanderson, 1990b, pp. 4-5; Padovic & Reskin, 1990; Tilly, 1996; Walby, 1986, pp. 52-54). Labour market processes, reinforced by national policy frameworks, create structures that prevent mothers from competing with men and childfree women for the best jobs, perpetuating inequities (Budig, 2002; Burchell, Dale, & Joshi, 1997; Dale, 1990; Dex, 2003, pp.13-15; Fagan, O'Reilly & Rubery, 2000, p. 176; Grant & Tancred, 1992, pp. 112-126; Gutek & Cohen, 1992, pp. 133-135; Hearn & Parkin, 1992, pp. 59-66; Lallement, 2000, pp. 278-289; Pratt & Hanson, 1991; Siltanen, 1994, p. 17; Williams, 2000). Mothers providing unpaid childcare, and women providing unpaid care services for their partners/husbands, enable fathers/men to compete more effectively in paid work (Badgett & Folbre, 2001, pp. 332-334; Baron & Bielby, 1982, p. 185; Budig, 2002; Crompton & Sanderson, 1990, pp. 16-18; Delphy, 1984; Folbre, 1994, pp. 3-23; Gottfried, 2006; Seccombe, 1993, p. 12; Williams, 2000). This allows men, especially fathers, to 'free ride' on the sacrifices of mothers' paid and unpaid work (Gottfried, 2006, pp. 122-132; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004, pp. 79-81).

Why is this the case? Women, including mothers, proved themselves capable of performing the full range of jobs normally done by men, at lower wages, in two World Wars. In some places, for long periods of time, mothers have been the main breadwinners and core workforces. It might be expected that it would make 'economic sense' to either put women/mothers at the head of the job queue, or employ the best person for the best job, irrespective of gender. At present, what we are seeing is that when employers do feminise male-dominated occupations, these good jobs tend to lose status and pay with poorer conditions and few or no prospects for a career. Only then are they seen as suitable for mothers returning to work. This is in stark contrast to the position of ex-servicemen returning to the workforce at the end of World War Two, when women workers, (especially wives and mothers) were expected to give up their jobs to make way for them.

Clearly, what we are witnessing is a complex system of gender-power relations at work (Acker, 1990 and 1999; Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Bailyn, 2003; Barnett & Rivers, 2004). Despite its complexity, the outcomes are remarkably consistent. The system appears to encompass both social and economic relations. Indeed, both are

sources of power. This means that we cannot expect employers (and governments) to create better employment opportunities for mothers simply because it makes economic sense, or simply because there are strong moral arguments in favour of gender equity. Instead, experience shows that women, especially mothers, are dependent on strong labour market demand in order to obtain entry to better jobs. This still means that mothers are in the least desirable jobs (at the back of the queue), and that their hold on even these jobs is tenuous.

Change cannot be brought about without an understanding of the system of job queues and gender queues. Two questions help such an understanding. One, as we have seen, is 'who benefits?' However, the other is 'who has the power?' Clearly without the power to pursue one's interests, nothing can be accomplished. At present in liberal and conservative nations, (mainly male) employers have considerable power and discretion when it comes to appointing staff. Their views on what is considered a proper order in the job queues tend to relegate mothers to the back of the queue. By contrast, in social democratic nations where the state exerts more control over employers, and where women are more involved in democratic processes, women including mothers, are able to obtain better work (and work-related supports) consistently (Anxo, 2002; Fagan & Rubery, 1999; Lovenduski, 1996). Clearly one of the answers is for women to use the developing labour shortage to their advantage to attempt to gain a better and more secure long-term place in the labour market. This will be discussed more in the concluding chapter on social policy.

Summary and conclusion

Job queues and gender queues provide a plausible conceptualisation of the processes of mothers' downward occupational mobility. A 'job queue and gender queue' model captures the complex nature of discrimination against mothers that has been persistent despite anti-discrimination legislation. The model provides an understanding of the processes whereby returners are channelled into less desirable positions at the back of the queue. To explain the process, we need a theory that takes account of the complex gender power relations at work. I have outlined two useful questions: who benefits and who has the power?

These four chapters have outlined returners' employment. The discussion provides the context in which to analyse and understand the empirical findings from this study. The next chapter, Chapter Five, begins Section Two of the thesis. The chapter provides a rationale for the research design, including the significance of the feminist approach adopted. This leads to the reporting of empirical results in Chapters Six to Nine.

However, before embarking on Section Two, a brief summary of Section One is provided to highlight the key issues discussed so far.

Brief summary of Section One

Section One has provided an outline of mothers' paid work participation, noting also the increasing number of mothers in continuous employment. Despite this increase and despite anti-discrimination legislation, however, it was noted that gender and labour market inequities persist. Women occupy the least preferred positions at the back of the queue and returners are placed even further back.

Section One has further provided a theoretical model to show the processes that lead to the relegation of returners to the back of the job queue, and outlined a theoretical perspective on the persistence of inequities between mothers and childfree individuals. An adapted job queues/gender queues (Reskin & Roos, 1990) model was used to conceptualise returners' location at the back of the queue. It was suggested that men as partners/spouses, employees and employers benefit from keeping returners at the back of the queue and they have a vested interest in keeping the status quo, thus perpetuating labour market inequities.

In addition, a study of national policy frameworks and returners suggests that national policy frameworks affect returners' employment opportunities: different welfare state regimes provide different levels of support to returners, mediating their employment outcomes. In most western industrialised nations, excepting the USA, social provision towards the cost of children appears to be more generous and extensive than that available in New Zealand. Overall, it appears that the social democratic nations, while

not perfect, nevertheless provide the most support for returners. These nations provide the most extensive and generous support for mothers, as well as more extensive regulation of the labour market, making it easier for returners to combine a paid work career with motherhood. The motherhood penalty is widest in liberal nations and narrowest in Scandinavian countries. Section One also noted that the continuing labour shortages internationally may increase the value of returners' labour so that labour market and social policies in all welfare state regimes will have to find more effective ways of returning mothers to the workforce without confining them to low status jobs at the back of the queue.

Introducing Section Two

The next section, Section Two, will discuss methodological issues and report on the empirical data made available by the interviews and focus group with mothers, and the mail survey and interviews with employers. This section begins with Chapter Five and ends with Chapter Nine. Chapter Five deals with methodology and the empirical chapters (Chapters Six to Nine) compare and contrast the experiences of returners with the reported practices of employers in the study. Chapters Six to Eight focus on the experiences of mothers while Chapter Nine explores the beliefs, assumptions and practices of employers. The section also notes the areas of incongruence in the empirical data.

In the final section, Section Three, the empirical data is summarised and integrated with the literature outlined in Section One. Chapter Ten integrates and discusses the findings with the key issues raised in Sections One and Two. The final chapter, Chapter Eleven, concludes the study with suggestions to improve returners' employment opportunities and strategies to prevent mothers from being constantly placed at the back of the queue.

SECTION TWO: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and methods chosen for this project, and provides a rationale for that choice. It examines the value of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and justifies the use of a primarily qualitative approach. The chapter outlines the methods of sampling, data collection, and analysis used in this research. Ethical issues are also outlined, followed by a brief reflection on the effects of the research on the participants, and on myself as a researcher. The chapter further introduces the participants of the study.

Research design and methods

This research aimed to investigate in-depth the experiences of a sample of returners. I was keen to discover how a group of mothers fared when they returned to paid work after their child-related 'career breaks'. In particular I wanted to know anything that had helped or hindered their efforts to obtain a good job or resume their previous career.

The investigation into mothers' experiences employed exclusively qualitative methods. However, this was supplemented by other methods. I conducted 21 individual face-to-face interviews and two focus group sessions of five mothers. I also carried out a wide literature review relevant to returners, as well as a study of New Zealand and overseas social policy documents. In addition, I conducted six face-to-face interviews and a national mail survey of employers, to discover their attitudes and practices towards returners. This allowed me to gain an impression of how typical the responses of this group of returners are, and to assess the implications of their responses for mothers and their wider communities.

The questions that the study sought to answer were posed in Chapter One. I reiterate them in this chapter: What do a group of New Zealand returners identify as barriers to resuming a career? What processes contribute to these returners' location at the back of the job queue? What more could government and employer policies do to assist mothers who take career breaks for children to return to good jobs at the head of or further up the job and gender queues?

The analysis of the empirical data collected made use of statistical methods, theme identification, and data reduction (Crotty, 1998, p. 5). The research approach is also influenced by a broadly feminist approach that addresses issues of power and potential for change for both researcher and research participants.

Rationale for research design

A primarily qualitative approach using the face-to-face interview and focus group of mothers enabled me to explore mothers' experiences in-depth (Babbie, 1989; Bryman, 1988; Paton, 1990). This allowed me to capture an approximation of returners' reality based on their experiences (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2001, p. 61; Bryman, 1988, p. 52). Unlike in most quantitative approaches where it is sometimes assumed that one can capture a common, external social reality, a qualitative approach allowed me to understand mothers' experiences as a "negotiated truth" (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2001, p. 61; Bryman, 1988, p. 50; Cassell & Symon, 1994, p.2; Easterby-Smith & Lowe, 1991, p. 22; Harding, 1987, pp. 1-14; Jayaratne, 1983, pp. 154-159; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991; Millman & Kanter, 1987, pp. 29-35; Mowbray & Yoshima, 2001; Saratankos, 2005, p. 35; Silverman, 2000; Smith, 1987, p. 92; Smith & Noble-Spruell, 1986, p. 137; Solomon & Draine, 2001; Spencer, Ritchie & O'Connor, 2003; Snape & Spencer, 2003, pp. 1-15; Sprague & Kobrynowicz, 1999, pp. 26-29). A qualitative approach also took into consideration the potential for researcher partisanship in the findings of a study: it allows the research participants to present their 'reality' or 'facts' in their own voice (Bulmer, 1982; Bryson, 1979; Guillemin & Horowitz, 1983; Lindholm, 1987, p. 169; Rein, 1983).

By using the face-to-face interview, I was able to gather information into the 'hows' and 'whats' of people's lives, enabling the collection of rich, in-depth data on the experiences of mothers returning to paid work (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646-647; Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003, pp. 138-169). A semi-structured interview schedule, based on my reading and personal observation, enabled me to prompt participants for responses and provided me with a means to ensure that I covered all topics in the interview (Fontana & Frey, 2000, pp. 649-657; Weiss, 1994). It allowed me to focus the interviews on mothers' experiences of returning to paid work, rather than on their complete life history. It further enabled me to raise issues not previously covered in

the literature such as the additional costs of job search (postage, work-appropriate attire, printing and other sundry costs) that the returners in this study claimed led to delayed re-entry to paid work. In addition, by being able to observe participants' body language, I was able to gain insight into their feelings and attitudes in regard to the issues being explored (Leggard, Keegan & Ward, 2003, pp. 141-143).

The individual interview also lends itself to being integrated with other methods to increase the depth and range of data (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 668). Further, from a feminist standpoint, a semi-structured interview guide reduces the tendency to 'objectify' the participant, encouraging a more egalitarian relationship than would have been possible with a more traditional, structured interview guide (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2001, pp. 61-79; Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 83; Finch, 1984; J. Lewis, 2003, pp. 63-65; Oakley, 1981, p 41; Rein, 1983; Riddell, 1989; Weiss, 1994, p. 207).

My positive experience in using the face-to-face interview in an earlier project on mothers suffering morning sickness encouraged me to choose the face-to-face interview method in the current study. In my study of morning sickness sufferers, as a fellow sufferer, I found the interview particularly useful in creating rapport and meaningful sharing of information with my participants (Birks, 1994). In this particular study, the women suggested that they felt a cathartic release from sharing their experiences with me. I was thus encouraged to hope that the mothers in this study would feel similarly bolstered by their involvement in the study. Indeed, at the end of the interview, the participants would invariably enthuse about sharing their stories, as a way of validating their experiences and expressing their frustration and dissatisfaction with the conditions of their employment.

My choice to include a focus group of mothers in the current study was based on the additional benefits of gathering information by talking to mothers within a social context of a small, interactive group (Berg, 1998; Madriz, 2000). This was very useful in exploring the emerging themes and issues surrounding mothers' experiences of returning to paid work. A focus group allowed a dynamic and very effective way of generating additional insight into the experiences of mothers (Finch & Lewis, 2003, pp. 170-176; Murphy, Cockburn & Murphy, 1992). It enabled a social context in which mothers could explore and voice their own views in the context of the views of

other group members (Paton, 1990). The group environment allowed participants to stimulate each other, compare their experiences and come to an understanding of their own experiences, while also providing the researcher with a full and rounded picture of their experiences (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997). A focus group is also efficient in that the interview can be conducted with a group of mothers located in one place at the same time, thus making it cost effective and relatively less time-consuming than the individual interview (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003).

In addition, a wide reading of other research and official data supplemented the qualitative survey of mothers, contributing to increased reliability and validity of the empirical findings (Bryman, 1988, pp. 134-140 & 1992; Denzin, 1989, pp. 234-243; Franklin & Ballan, 2001; Paton, 1990; Ritchie, 2003, pp. 38-43; Searle, 1999). While there is a shortage of New Zealand research on returners, a documentary review of the literature on the position of returners in different welfare state regimes allowed me to compare overseas research findings on returners with the experiences of the mothers in my study. This provided a context that enabled me to conclude that the experiences of the group of returners in this study was not unusual.

Qualitative approaches and methods, however, can be subject to researcher bias (Finch, 1986, p. 197; Jayaratne, 1983). Further, qualitative research can generate an overwhelming amount of data that is not only time-consuming to analyse, but also raises ambiguities (Paton, 1990; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p. 183). In addition, qualitative studies using small samples tend not to be representative of the whole population (Sprague & Kobryniewicz, 1999, pp. 37-38). These issues were carefully considered and accounted for in this study.

The research design for the project took the view that while qualitative methods generated a large amount of data, they also enabled the collection of rich and in-depth data from which to compare my findings with findings from other research. The saturation of data allowed me to gain a more rounded and in-depth understanding of mothers' experiences. Further, the study does not lay claims to generalizability, since the sample of returners was relatively small (Bryman, 1988; Denzin, 1989; Paton, 1990). However, the adherence to guidelines and data saturation reduced ambiguities in interpretation (Bryman, 1988; Franklin and Ballan, 2001, pp. 274-279;

Hammersley, 1992, pp. 46-52). These guidelines and the detailed notes taken during the study contributed to the validity and reliability of the study (Jayaratne, 1983, pp. 141-153; Jordan and Hoeffler, 2001; J. Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, pp. 268-269).

With the survey of employers, a mix of methods was used to provide a robust design (Bryman, 1992; Denzin, 1989; pp. 234-247; Du Bois, 1983, p. 109; Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p. 276; Patton, 1990; Reinharz, 1983, p. 162 and 1992; Sarantakos, 1993, p. 146; Searle, 1999, pp. 144-147; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, pp. 182-193). These methods included interviewing six employers, as well as a nationwide mail survey of employers using a standardised questionnaire. However, the mixing of methods involved some trade-offs (Du Bois, 1983, p. 111; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lewis, 1991, p. 22; Hammersley, 1992; Jayaratne, 1983, p. 141; Snape & Spencer, 2003, pp. 20-21).

The mail survey of employers allowed a wide range of employers to participate, enriching the data gathered. However, unlike in the face-to-face interview, a standardised questionnaire, especially when conducted by mail, made it more difficult to probe responses. This weakness was countered by the supplementary data gathered from the in-depth interviews with a sample of employers (Bryman, 1988, pp. 29-36; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Paton, 1990; Zikmund, 2003). This triangulation added depth and breadth to the study: the interviews with employers provided additional insight into the responses from the mail questionnaire, making the findings more meaningful and less superficial (Jayaratne, 1983, pp. 153-154; Jordan & Hoeffler, 2001, p. 279; J. Lewis, 2003, p. 47; Klein, 1983, pp. 95-96; Ritchie, Spencer & O'Conner, 2003, pp. 274-275; Zikmund, 2003).

Researching the experiences of returners

The study was conducted in stages. In the first stage I recruited a focus group to identify concepts and themes. I used a semi-structured interview guide for the focus group (Appendix 1a). In the second stage, I used the same interview guide for the in-depth interviews of returners. These themes were used to tease out the key issues used in the semi-structured interview guide for employers (Appendix 3a).

The main themes from the first ten individual interviews and the focus group with returners, and the six in-depth interviews with employers, were then used as a basis to develop a standardised questionnaire for employers (Appendix 4a). In designing the questionnaire, issues of concern to returners (that they identified as barriers to getting decent employment), such as access to childcare, paid parental leave and employers' recruitment practices, were used to explore employers' attitudes and workplace practices. A five-point Likert scale requiring participants to tick either 'agree strongly, agree, no opinion, disagree strongly or disagree' was used. Using a Likert scale reduced the time needed to respond to the questionnaire, as employers needed only to tick their chosen responses.

The themes that returners in the focus group identified closely resembled the experiences of the returners in the individual interviews and those identified in the literature on returners, suggesting a level of commonality that was useful in data analysis (Jordan & Hoeffler, 2001, p. 57; Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, pp. 273-276; Peterson, 2000, p. 79). These themes were further modified and refined after several readings through of the interview transcriptions.

With the individual interviews, I often found that at the end of an interview session, casual conversation would sometimes reveal further useful information relevant to the study. After a while and with the full permission of participants I allowed the tape to run while I packed up and made ready to leave. This, together with additional field notes taken while listening to the participants, enabled rich and in-depth data gathering.

In some households, quite often towards the end of the session, the husbands/partners of the participants would re-enter the room (where the interview took place) and comment on various issues such as the lack of state support for mothers to return to paid work. As they were not part of the survey, I was not able to quote them but they were eager for their views to be heard and quite readily gave permission for me to include them. However, this was not a feasible option as the study had a time limit and it would have taken extra time to get Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC)'s approval to include the husbands/partners. Nevertheless, their comments aided my understanding and interpretation of the returning experience.

These accidental participants sometimes provided an even better picture of the changing dynamics and concerns in the household when the mother returned or considered returning to paid work. Below I provide more details about the methods used.

The focus group of mothers

The focus group consisted of five mothers. In all, two focus group interviews, spaced a year apart, were conducted. Spacing the interviews allowed me to follow mothers' experiences over the 12 months in order to explore any change in mothers' feelings about their career opportunities over that time period. The first focus group was carried out at the end of 2001. Its purpose was exploratory in terms of concept building. A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 1a) was used to keep the conversation on track.

The interview took place in the sitting room of one of the participants. By way of acknowledging their contribution to the research, I offered refreshments half way through the interview. The mothers continued to explore and compare experiences during the coffee break. I had initially switched off the tape in the interest of privacy but the mothers had a great deal to say and were keen for me to continue taping. Hence the interview continued over the duration of the break and lasted over three hours in total.

With the second group interview (with the original five members) I was able to bring with me a list of key concepts and themes from the first focus group for verification and confirmation. The interview took place in the same location. It was very informal and the mothers were pleased to resume the conversation with the group. Although the key issues remained the same I noticed an increased level of dissatisfaction in the mothers in regard to their paid work. It seemed to me that the slightly optimistic views that they had of their paid work the previous year had diminished and been replaced with a sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction.

In both focus group meetings, the group dynamic was positive. By the second meeting, participants were noticeably more relaxed with each other and more vocal in expressing their feelings. Further, the fact that some members already knew each

other and the fact that I shared similar experiences created rapport within the group. The discussion was free flowing, allowing the mothers to express their reality in their own words in a relatively egalitarian environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Frey & Fontana, 1993; Madriz, 2000, p. 838-842).

A downside of focus groups is that “groupthink”, where other members of the group subsume their own opinions to that of a dominant or more vocal participant may occur (Finch & Lewis, 2003, pp. 183- 197). However, in this study participants were considerate of their use of time and would apologise and then urge other mothers to “butt” in, when they felt they had monopolised the conversation. Several times during the course of the discussion the participants would talk into the tape recorder in order to highlight pet issues and gripes so that I would remember to focus on them. Nevertheless, there were times when conversation strayed, though with the small size of the group, it took minimum effort on my part to refocus the conversation as the group tended to be self-monitoring.

Recruitment of focus group participants

The focus group members were recruited from a group of mothers who had recently returned to paid work. Using a snowballing process, I contacted five mothers and all five mothers accepted the invitation to participate in the project. I contacted the mothers by phone where I explained the purpose of the research project and provided an estimation of the duration of group meetings. I also informed them of their rights as participants.

Profile of focus group participants

The participants were aged from mid forties to early fifties. Three of the mothers were married and the other two were single mothers. All these participants had been out of the paid workforce for ten years or more. At the time of the study all the participants had returned to employment, in common with the experiences of the other mothers interviewed individually.

The participants were a highly skilled group. All the mothers held tertiary degrees, some at post-graduate level, as well as substantial paid work experiences. The jobs they had held before having children included veterinarian, specialist technician,

educators, and hearing-impaired specialist. All the mothers had been in full-time employment before taking breaks to take care of children.

Two of the women had reached the top of their professions before taking career breaks to immigrate to New Zealand. Under 'normal' circumstances, their qualifications and extensive (professional) paid work experiences would have meant they could find career jobs in New Zealand. However, childcare responsibilities and the lack of family and social policy support meant they had to take extended career breaks. Of the other three mothers, one had trained and been in paid work in New Zealand before having children. The remaining two mothers had had overseas as well as additional New Zealand training and had paid employment in the New Zealand context before taking time out for childcare.

All five mothers had had intermittent, short-hours (2-less-than-8-hours) paid and unpaid employment periods outside the home while the children were little. All participants reported the cost and unavailability of quality childcare and a lack of kinship support to be major barriers to continuing paid employment. However, while out of paid work these mothers participated in a wide range of unpaid work in the community. These jobs included serving on school boards of trustees, church secretary/treasurer, parent centre supervisors and Girl Guide leaders. At the time of the interview all the mothers had returned to part-time paid jobs but were in various stages of looking for better-paid positions.

Recruitment of mothers for the in-depth interviews

The first 17 in-depth interviews with mothers occurred between 2002-2003. A further four mothers were interviewed in early 2004, giving a total of 21 individual interviews of Maori and Pakeha mothers. The participants were recruited using media advertisement and snowballing. Two advertisements were placed in *The Manawatu Evening Standard*, *The Tribune* and *The Horowhenua Mail* (Appendix 2a) within the Manawatu region. My decision to locate the advertisement in the job section of selected newspapers was done following the advice of the person responsible for placing advertisements.

Despite running the advertisements on several consecutive evenings each time, this method did not draw a lot of response. Several of the mothers who responded suggested that not many mothers would read the papers except when they were seriously looking for jobs. However, I suspected most employers in the region would use informal networks to recruit returners so that the number of returners actually relying on formal recruitment channels such as the media would be lower. In the end I relied on a snowballing process that successfully drew participants of similar characteristics (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003, pp. 96-98).

Profile of in-depth interview participants

The participants were aged from 35 to over 50 years. Only two mothers were in the age range 35-39; seven were in the over 50-age group. Most of the returners had school-aged children that they were still responsible for on a day-to-day basis. Only one mother had a preschool child (about a year old) while four had adult children. The majority (13 participants) had post-secondary qualifications. Most held degree or post-degree qualifications, with many also holding professional qualifications such as nursing and teaching, or specialist health technician/scientist. Only four participants had no formal qualifications apart from compulsory schooling.

Three of the four Maori mothers (one partnered and three sole mothers) had made use of training allowances while in receipt of a Domestic Purposes Benefit, to gain further qualifications or work-related training while the children were little. At the time of the interview these mothers were highly qualified and in full-time employment. One of these three mothers had also gained extensive paid work experience especially with whanau-related work, which later enabled her to provide training and job placement for the women in her community. The partnered Maori mother was from a higher social economic background and had trained as a health technician before having children. All four mothers had returned to casual jobs in between children, as did the other mothers in the focus group and in individual interviews.

Most of the returners had been out of the paid workforce for six to ten years. Two participants had longer breaks of 11-16 years. Four mothers had breaks of less than five years. Only one mother stayed at home for 22 years. Prior to taking career breaks, the mothers had held various paid work positions including clerks/secretaries, shop

assistants, school principal, teachers, midwives, registered nurses, health and technical scientists, international and national consultants and town planners. All but four of the mothers claimed they had taken career breaks in order to look after children. Two mothers cited ill health as well as childcare as a reason for career breaks. Another two mothers cited getting married as a primary reason, although they also said that it was in anticipation of starting a family.

Like the mothers in the focus group, these mothers also had a history of extensive voluntary/community work while raising families. A sample of unpaid work undertaken included serving on parent centre, kindergarten or school committees, clerical/administrative work for the church, treasurer and supervisor of play centres. Other job experiences cited were budget advisor, conference organizer, librarian, tutor, project manager (one with a budget of \$80,000) and Girl Guide leader or chairperson of school board of trustees. These were all skilled jobs and the participants would have gained valuable skills relevant to paid work from such activities.

Recruitment of employers for in-depth interviews

In addition to interviewing mothers I also interviewed six employers (five females and one male) from the Manawatu region. The employers were selected for ease of access and willingness to participate. I attempted to include organisations that were likely to employ returners.

Once I had identified the sectors I wanted to access, I made cold calls to organisations in the Manawatu area that I thought might be interested to participate. As with the focus group and individual interviews, I contacted the employers by phone where I provided information about the project, and outlined their rights as participants. All the participants contacted responded positively once I had explained the purpose of my study.

The interview guide (Appendix 3a) for employers included attitudinal items such as employers' beliefs in regard to their perceptions of barriers to employing returners. They were also asked about their attitudes in regard to childcare, paid and unpaid parental leave, the best way to encourage mothers to return to paid work, and their

overall impression of returners' paid work performance. In addition, they were asked to indicate their most common practices in recruitment, hiring and promotions, as well as the ways they had for keeping in touch with mothers on career breaks. These items correlated with the items used in the mail survey questionnaire (Appendix 4a).

Profile of interviewed employers

The employers came from retailing, banking, education, elder care and local government. Participants ranged in age from mid-thirties to over fifties. The positions they held included (state) secondary school principals, middle-level managers (one with a workforce of more than 500 employees in retail), owner-manager and Chief Executive Officer of a local government agency. All the employers interviewed claimed they had experience of employing mothers returning to paid work.

The mail survey of employers: The questionnaire

The questionnaire for employers (Appendix 4a) was designed to explore employers' views and attitudes toward employing mothers returning to paid work. The items were developed from key issues identified in the focus group and face-to-face interviews of mothers and several employers. In designing the questionnaire, I also referred extensively to the literature on returners both in New Zealand and overseas to ensure that key items considered to affect mothers' employment opportunities were included.

The key variables were classed under six main groups, namely company profile, general perception (of returners/mothers' employment) recruitment, selection and induction, employers' perceptions of mothers returning to paid work and background information (respondent's bio-data). Employers' attitudes and perceptions in regard to employing mothers included employers' perceptions of the biggest challenge to employing mothers, mothers' qualifications and skills/competences as well as employers' overall perception about returners' paid work performance. Further, employers were asked their views in regard to the best way of assisting mothers into paid work, as well as their attitudes towards childcare, and paid and unpaid parental leave. In addition, they were also asked to identify the most commonly used recruitment and selection methods and to indicate whether they encouraged mothers on career breaks to return to their organisations and if so, the means of maintaining contact with these mothers.

While a postal survey has the advantage of being the most cost effective means of gathering data, there are also some limitations to its use. It is a relatively slow process since several weeks could (and did) elapse from the beginning to the end of the process. There is also less opportunity to check responses in a mail survey than is possible with the face-to-face interview. Further, poorly designed questionnaires could result in a low response rate that would make it difficult to draw conclusive and valid results and/or to generalise findings (Gray, 2004, pp. 108-109).

However, these limitations were not insurmountable. Given the time and financial constraints of PhD research, I decided a mail survey was still the most effective and affordable method of accessing the widest reach of employers. To counter the potential for a low response rate, I employed a number of techniques suggested by the literature. I included a cover letter (Appendix 4b) to explain the purpose of the study as well as postage paid return envelopes. In addition I posted reminder postcards (Appendix 4c) two-to-three weeks after the posting of the questionnaires.

Ease of response was also built into the questionnaire. The items were structured so that participants needed only to tick response boxes. The whole questionnaire would have taken around 20-to-30 minutes to complete. I also included my telephone number and email address to encourage participants to contact me with comments or enquiries.

Pre-testing the questionnaire

In designing the questionnaire I followed the advice of my chief supervisor and the consultant statistician based at Massey University, Palmerston North. The questionnaire was pre-tested by several people including several of my colleagues, one of whom worked in marketing. Another colleague, who had just completed her own research questionnaire, was able to use her experience to suggest ways to improve my questionnaire design. A second colleague, also owner of a small business, provided some suggestions for making the questionnaire (more) user-friendly. Outside the university the questionnaire was pre-tested by a high school principal, and the middle manager of a large academic institution. The feedback from the pre-tests was used to refine the questionnaire in order to reduce ambiguities and improve ease of use, as well as to minimise the time taken to complete it.

These techniques improved the quality of the data. For instance, several employers took the trouble to return questionnaires giving reasons for why they declined participation. Various reasons were given ranging from lack of time, self-employment, the company no longer existed or had been taken over by other groups of employers. Some participants emailed me to apologise and explain that time constraint or internal organisational changes meant that they could not participate in the survey. A few employers who did not employ returners did not feel qualified to respond. One participant emailed me to say that as a self-employed person it was not possible to comment on the issues except to say that paid parental leave added to employers' costs and could make a self-employed person biased against mothers and potential mothers. These responses provided useful information and assured me that non-response was not due to poor design.

Recruitment of postal survey of employers

The postal survey covered both the North and South Islands and included retail, health, education, banking and financial sectors. Since including all employer types was out of the question for a survey of this size, I decided to focus on employers in small-to-medium organisations who were likely to employ mothers.

In selecting mail survey participants I took a random sample within the group identified as my sources namely, the directories of *New Zealand Business Who's Who*, *AA Accommodation Guide*, (2004) and the *New Zealand Yellow Pages* (Telecom 2004). From each source I selected every tenth employer listed on a page until I reached the end of each book. In total 700 questionnaires were sent. In this way I accessed a range of employers from both the North and South Islands.

It has been suggested that a response rate of 30 to 50 percent is considered satisfactory while 70 percent response rate would be considered exceptionally good (Cooper & Emory, 1995). In this study, response rate of 31.1% (218 responses) was attained, making it a satisfactory response rate. Discounting the 76 who declined to participate, this resulted in 142 (20.3%) useable questionnaires.

Characteristics of the mail survey sample

Of the employers who responded, the majority (83.1%) were private sector employers. Only 13.4 percent of responses came from the public sector. Community and non-profit making organisations comprised 3.5 percent of respondents as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Sector of employment of respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Private company	118	83.1
State Owned Enterprises (SOE)	2	1.4
Voluntary organisation	5	3.5
Public listed company	17	12.0
Other	0	0
Total	142	100.0

As indicated in Table 2 below, business and financial services (30%), wholesale, retail and trade (26.8 %), and manufacturing (29%) occupations made up most of the responses. The employers in the service-oriented sector (30% response rate came from this sector) were more likely to employ or have employed mothers returning to paid work.

Table 2. Classification according to the NZ Standard Industrial Classifications

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture, Hunting, Hunting, Forestry, Fishing	8	5.6
Mining and Quarrying	0	0.0
Manufacturing	29	20.4
Electricity, Gas and Water	5	3.5
Building and Construction	8	5.6
Wholesale, Retail and Trade	38	26.8
Transport, Storage and Communication	10	7.1
Business and Financial Services	30	21.1
Community, Social and Personal Services	14	9.9
Total	142	100.0

Profile of mail survey employers

A range of employers aged from 20-60 years responded. A high number of respondents (63.5%) were aged 40-59 years. About a third (31.6%) were aged between 20-39 years. Very few (9.2%) employers were aged over sixty. In addition, more female (54.2%) than male (45.8%) employers responded to the survey.

More than half of respondents (67.6%) were located in the 'Other North Island' region. 'Other North Island' referred to areas north of the Manawatu. This distinction was made to account for the fact that employers in the Manawatu region were surveyed mostly through face-to-face interviews: fewer employers in this region were also listed in the sample sources indicated above. The South Island region and the Manawatu region of the North Island made up 23.9 percent and 8.5 percent of the survey respectively, comprising just over a third of the responses (32.4%).

Just over a third of the respondents (35.9%) identified their position as that of 'Manager' with a further third (30.3%) identifying themselves as 'Director'. A smaller number of employers (17.6%) identified themselves as 'Chief Executive Officer' and only a small minority (2.8%) classified themselves as Supervisor or Human Resources Personnel. Employers in these mid-upper level management positions were likely to be actively involved in making employment related decisions including the recruitment of employees: their views and business practices were likely to influence mothers' employment outcomes.

Analysing the qualitative data

A large amount of data was collected from the focus group and individual interviews of mothers. This took a fair amount of time to record, sort and analyse. With the employers' interviews, however, the small sample of employers made the analysis less complicated and so less time consuming than that of the interviews with mothers. The qualitative data analysis of mothers and employers followed the same format.

Analysis of returners' interviews

Each interview tape (from the focus group, and individual interviews with mothers) was fully transcribed. The themes from the first ten individual interviews of mothers were used to check that the most frequently mentioned issues/themes identified by

mothers in the individual interviews were the same as or similar to those identified by mothers in the focus group. Once this was checked, I went through each fully transcribed tape and identified common themes. Where they differed, I was generally able to identify experientially similar underpinnings so that on a broader level, such differences did not necessarily change the overall themes.

Once such preliminary checks were done, I used Excel spreadsheets to group comments under appropriate headings/themes. The headings I used were demographic statistics (age, number of children, previous paid work experience, voluntary work), reasons for career break, preparing to return, terms and conditions of paid work, feelings about re-entry jobs, barriers/difficulties of getting full-time jobs, and other. This allowed me to cross-reference the themes from each individual interview with those identified in the focus group interviews.

The themes were further refined and renamed after several listenings to the tapes and after cross-referencing with the themes identified in the literature. The themes that mothers generated were very similar to those identified in the literature on returners. These themes are reported in Part Two (Chapters Six to Eight) and discussed in Chapter Ten. There was also a very high degree of similarity between the comments made by individual mothers and mothers in the focus group. This made it possible to combine data from the focus group with that from individual interviews, so that aggregated data only were used in the report and discussion of the qualitative data.

Qualitative analysis of the employers' interviews

As with the interviews with mothers, all six individual interviews with employers were fully transcribed. After each transcription, key concepts were highlighted and cross-referenced to mothers' comments, as well as to the data obtained from the questionnaire. The employers' survey results are reported in Chapter Nine. Areas of incongruence were noted for further investigation with reference to the literature, and discussed in Chapter Eleven. Data from the individual interviews with the six employers also provided in-depth information that helped to shed light on the quantitative data obtained from the mail questionnaire.

Quantitative data analysis of the questionnaire

The analysis of the questionnaire was more straightforward because the items were coded using the themes identified by the group and individual interviews of mothers. Further, the use of a Likert scale made it easier to code and analyse responses. Raw data from the questionnaire were tabulated using Excel spreadsheets. Areas of congruence and divergence between mothers' comments and employers' views and claims about their workplace practices were noted. These were then cross-referenced to the data from the employers' interviews, to satisfy me that the data did not differ significantly so significantly as to distort or nullify responses.

As the aim of the quantitative study was to explore employers' attitudes and practices, in order to supplement understanding of the issues that mothers identified, more detailed quantitative analysis was not deemed necessary. The quantitative data provided a background against which mothers' qualitative experiences could be interpreted. For this purpose, simple descriptive data using percentages were considered more useful than more complicated data requiring the use of sophisticated computer software.

Ethical issues

In research, values, ethics and politics are closely linked (Bryson, 1979, p. 87; Bulmer, 1982; Finch, 1984, 1986; Guillemin & Horowitz, 1983; Lindblom, 1987; Neuman & Krueger, 2003; Rein, 1983; Sarantakos, 1993, p. 34). This project followed ethical guidelines set out by MUHEC, especially in regard to the safety and privacy of the participants when reporting the empirical data.

Before any fieldwork was carried out I applied for and was given permission by MUHEC to carry out the study. MUHEC guidelines for carrying out research are comprehensive and cover ethical issues regarding confidentiality, informed consent and full revelation of the research purpose and objectives in line with the Human Rights Act, 1993. In many ways, MUHEC approval of the research implied that major ethical issues had been identified and effectively dealt with. Although it was not a requirement of MUHEC I felt a responsibility to the participants to complete the research and make the findings public.

Confidentiality

As New Zealand has a small population, it is easy to identify research participants unless good care is taken to avoid this. In this study, I transcribed and analysed the raw data myself. To minimise the risk of participants being identified in my findings and analysis, I removed all identifying labels such as names, professions and organisations. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to check their transcripts, though none took up the offer.

The study also made use of aggregated reporting. Confidentiality can be assured when comments and attributions in reports or presentations do not identify participants either through direct quotes linking comments to participants or indirectly through a collection of characteristics attributable to a person or group of individuals (Lewis, 2003, pp. 67-68). The use of aggregates enabled identifying characteristics of participants to be removed (Neuman & Krueger, 2003, p. 107).

Informed consent

MUHEC requires that participants be given information about the study before they consent to being interviewed. Prior to each face-to-face interview, I made telephone contacts with interested participants where I explained the purpose of the study and their rights should they decide to participate. They were informed of their rights to decline to participate, stop participation during the interview and information about how data and transcripts would be analysed and kept. After this explanation I offered to send a copy of the information sheet (Appendix 2b). I also took a copy of the information sheet with me to interviews where I would go through it with participants to ensure that they were in no doubt about the nature of the study and were still interested in participating. I then asked their permission to tape the interview before they signed the consent form (Appendix 2c).

For survey participants I included a cover letter (Appendix 4b) describing the study and details of how I could be contacted. I included a clear statement that informed consent to participate was assumed once participants undertook to respond to the survey. I also explained that all identifying items would be changed or deleted and that I would be the only one who would be involved in analysing the questionnaire. As with the individual interviews, mail survey participants were also informed of their rights not to participate.

For both face-to-face and mail survey participants I kept the names and addresses of those who wanted a copy of the summary of findings separate from their interview transcripts and returned questionnaires.

Harm to participants

Issues of potential harm to those taking part in the research also needed to be addressed before MUHEC gave permission for the study to proceed. In general, harm can refer to both physical and psychological damage as a result of participation in a study. For instance, being reminded of traumatic experiences may leave a participant anxious and distressed. In this study no such harm was identified. Indeed it may have been helpful to participants to be able to discuss and identify the issues facing them on their return to paid work.

Nevertheless, feminist researchers have suggested that women's willingness to share and disclose personal information places them in a vulnerable position (Finch, 1984, p. 207). For instance, it has been noted that women, being accustomed to answering questions in relation to healthcare for the family, were more likely to be very open about sharing their stories with researchers. Further, interviews carried out in the home have been said to be quite comfortable and lull participants into believing they were merely sharing information (Finch, 1984, p. 74). Such rapport may create an illusion of a friendship that cannot not be maintained outside of the interview environment. In addition, the potential for the researcher to use the data to benefit his/her career would make the relationship less than one of real friendship and truly egalitarian (Jayaratne, 1983, p. 150).

Some of these issues needed addressing in this study. My in-depth and group interviews of returners were conducted mostly in the homes of the participants (their choice of location) giving rise to the potential for them to believe they were just having a normal conversation as suggested above. I was careful, therefore, to follow accepted/ standard procedural guidelines and specifications in order to minimise any negative impact on my participants as a result of their participation in the study.

In particular, I was acutely aware that my presence in participants' lives was an intrusion into their privacy and that any relationship I created with them was

necessarily short-term and not sustainable. In all cases, I was careful to show appreciation of their consideration while also maintaining a professional stance. While my approach was informal and friendly, I was also careful to make them understand that they did not have to share any information that they might feel uncomfortable sharing. I was mindful of the need not to create false rapport or rapport gained through being seen as someone to talk to (Finch, 1984; Oakley, 1981) and thus manipulative (Reinharz, 1983, p. 181) or exploitative (Finch, 1984; Fontana & Frey 2000). Following in the footsteps of Finch (1984) and Oakley (1981), I made it clear that I was open for them to know me by allowing them to ask me questions of interest to them (Jayaratne, 1983, p. 150). I explained that the data collected would allow me to write a PhD thesis and perhaps other kinds of publication for public consumption. On the whole, the mothers were very supportive of my aims. Moreover, they were very keen for their stories to be told.

The mothers, on the whole, were very trusting and eager to share their stories with me. They appeared to have organised to ensure they had sufficient undisturbed time with me. For instance, partnered mothers with young children would often have made arrangements for their partners to take the children out of the house for the duration of the interview. Some mothers would inevitably express a hope that the research would lead to some sort of change for returners though they were hesitant to suggest that they deserved some assistance. I explained that the study would take a few years to complete, as I was only able to do it on a part-time basis. To this I would invariably get encouraging nods that for them the fact that there was a study being done was a good enough start.

Power relationship

This issue is not raised by MUHEC but appears often in feminist research. In general, the researcher-researched relationship is hierarchical rather than egalitarian (Snape & Spencer, 2003, pp. 11-18). It is a power relationship in favour of the researcher as this individual has more knowledge about the study (Harding, 1987, p 181; Mies, 1983, pp 122-128; Oakley, 1981). In my study, I worked on the premise that returners are a relatively 'voiceless' and 'invisible' group (Crittenden, 2001, p. 255). By taking the position of a researcher who wanted to gain access to their stories, I knew more about the study requirements, suggesting a less balanced position between the participants

and myself. The mothers appeared to want to please me by ending their responses with, "Is that what you want?" I would inevitably respond with: "I am interested in what you have to say because you understand the situation you are in better than I do," and that would often reassure them that they were the drivers of the conversation.

By researching from the bottom-up (as a returner myself) and being aware of conscious partiality (Finch, 1986; Mies, 1983, pp. 122-128; Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 195) I hoped to create a more egalitarian relationship where reciprocity of information was possible (J. Lewis, 2003, pp. 64-65; Oakley, 1981, pp. 42-55; Reinharz, 1983, pp 177-182). During the interview I made it clear that participants could make suggestions regarding the study if they wanted to and indeed many did. Some participants emailed me further 'thoughts' following the interview. This created a more egalitarian relationship. On the whole, I found that the mothers and also the six employers that I interviewed were very enthusiastic and positive about the research. I often came away from interviews feeling very energised and encouraged to do more to expose the position of returners.

Learning from the research

The process of conducting research can encourage personal growth for both the researcher and the researched (Mies, 1983). Feminist research, especially, aims at increasing women's awareness of their oppression with a view to encourage change. By self-reflection, the researcher can have a better understanding of the phenomenon being researched as well as of her personal growth through doing the research (Reinharz, 1983, p. 174 and 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1990, pp. 21-24).

This appears to be true for both the participants and myself, as the next section suggests.

Effects on participants

On the whole, the participants were very positive about the study. They were interested to know that their situation was not unique; neither was it caused by a weakness on their part. As in other research, (Oakley, 1981, 1986; Finch, 1986), the mothers often used the interviews as a way of finding out the situation of women like themselves. As in my study on morning sickness, I found that the mothers welcomed the opportunity to

discuss a situation that they had secretly felt embarrassed about (failure to gain employment, for instance) or very frustrated and angry with.

The mothers sometimes used the interview as an opportunity to complain about the way that they felt the wider society undervalued mothers and motherhood-related tasks. Some mothers expressed surprise and indignation at how much a woman's self-esteem and self-confidence could be undermined by being a stay-at-home mother. Others expressed deep felt anger at the way they felt employers unfairly (even extremely rudely) treated them. And at the end of the interview, they would often give me a wide smile and say they felt better for having shared their frustrations.

The returners appreciated being asked to participate. They understood the project as a step toward making the position of mothers more visible. They expressed delight at being part of the research, often suggesting that it was an important study that they were happy to contribute to. Although I had not asked about how they felt at the end of the interview, I felt that these mothers regarded the interview as a process where they might have felt they had some power to contribute toward change. They would often say that they appreciated being able to contribute to the research.

The mothers suggested that participating in the study enabled them to reflect on their current position: they felt being a part of the study gave them better understanding of their own situation. This often led to a re-evaluation of the value of paid work and childcare. They were able to identify the value that they provided for their immediate household and to the community (in terms of unpaid work). This then led to the mothers feeling that they had performed significant work by being at home for their family and to an extent affirmed the value of being a stay-at-home mum. Some participants commented that being part of the research had given them an opportunity to be part of the solution. In addition, knowing that they were not the only one in the situation appeared to reassure them that their failure to return to good (career) jobs was not necessarily a personal failure.

It was not possible to estimate the impact of participation in the research on the employers in the mail survey except by noting that most employers who wanted to participate appeared to have taken considerable care in making their opinions count.

They also responded quite promptly to the survey, suggesting perhaps that they regarded it as important to respond within the time frame to ensure their comments were taken into consideration. Many of these employers expressed an interest in the research findings: they wanted to be given a summary of the findings.

The employers who were interviewed face-to-face appeared to appreciate being part of the study. These employers appeared to be quite proud of their workplace practices that they considered supportive of returners. They felt that they offered returners a pathway into paid work by providing flexible hours of work (although this was often at lower pay). They did not, however, appear to have considered the effects of their policies and practices on returners' employment. These employers also suggested they were very interested to learn about the findings from the research.

Effects on the researcher

The research changed my consciousness in the way that major life changing experiences have been seen as energising catalysts for change (Mies, 1983, p. 125). Conducting and making sense of this research have given me valuable insight into my own experiences and those of returners more generally. The whole research process has contributed to my increased sense of confidence.

Prior to starting the research, I did not see my contribution to the household that included home schooling my three older children while also nursing a new born baby, creating an essentially self-sufficient household in terms of being family hairdresser, seamstress, cleaner, cook, baby minder and so on, as adding to the social as well as economic well being of my family. I had thought of it all as something that a stay-at-home mum would normally do. Like many other women, I had internalised the idea that only paid work counted (Williams, 2000, p. 121) and had been plagued by guilt about not being in paid work when I had tertiary qualifications. I had taken the socially sanctioned 'obligation to care' for 'choice' (to be a stay-at-home mum) while also fighting another social norm that told me I should be putting my tertiary degrees to better economic use. As a result I spent many years feeling guilty and anxious and overcompensating in other areas.

Listening to the stories that returners in this study told me about their paid work experiences and being exposed to the large amount of feminist literature during the course of this research have changed my perspective on 'choice'. I had not been able to exercise real choice: to be a good mother while also being a paid worker with real opportunities to build a career. This insight has helped to ease the angst that has been part of my whole adult life and is beginning to change my perspective from self-denigration to attributing some of my lack of success as a paid worker to structural factors beyond my control.

The research gave me a deep conviction about the need for more practical assistance and protection for returners so that taking a career break would not lead to a broken career. Whereas once I would have thought women who choose to have children should accept the costs associated with having and raising them, now I am more inclined to think there should be a better way: one where the costs can be shared, as is possible in some industrialised nations, in particular the social democratic nations. Currently, in New Zealand, as in most liberal welfare nations, the notion of choice not only cushions but also makes respectable a mother's loss of career. It makes being in low paid, low status jobs at the back of the queue more 'palatable' and so acceptable.

Conclusion

There are some limitations to the methodology used in this study. In particular, the sample of returners is relatively small and comprised of mainly Pakeha mothers. The empirical data is not based on a nationally representative sample and the results are not generalisable to the wider population. Nevertheless, the in-depth data collected from mothers supplemented by a wide reading of the literature, and study of New Zealand and overseas policy documents, plus in-depth interviews of employers, complemented by a national survey of employers, have made it possible for me to note that the experiences of these mothers are not too dissimilar from those of mothers in other liberal welfare nations.

This chapter concludes the contextual setting for this research. The chapter has described and provided a rationale for the methods chosen for the study. It has also discussed ethical issues and provided some background information about the study's participants as well as a brief outline of how data analysis was carried out. It also

reflected on the effects of the research on the participants and on myself, as a researcher. In the following chapter, Chapter Six, the re-entry experiences of these mothers will be discussed.

CHAPTER SIX: STARTING OVER: MOTHERHOOD COSTS

Introduction

This is one of three chapters covering mothers' experiences, as reported by the participants in this study. It focuses on the costs to mothers of taking career breaks for children. Mothers returning to paid work are relegated to the back of the queue. Most mothers face occupational downgrading leading to a loss of career and earning capacity. The following chapter, Chapter Seven, explores the processes by which returners are assigned low status jobs at the back of the queue and discusses the factors contributing to these processes. Chapter Eight then completes the report with a focus on the often inferior conditions of mothers' re-entry employment.

The themes set out in these chapters reflect the mothers' accounts of the difficulties of returning to career type jobs, the costs of taking career breaks and the often sub-standard conditions of these mothers' re-entry employment. The themes were extracted from the transcripts of the focus and individual interviews, with reference to the themes identified in the literature on returners. Since the themes identified from the focus groups were identical to those of individual interviews they have been merged and reported as aggregated data.

Although the literature on returners suggests heterogeneity of returners' preferences (Hakim, 2004), the result of the returners' survey (through individual interviews and focus group meetings) for this project indicates a clearly shared preference for career type jobs with good conditions such as good pay (or at least pay commensurate with qualifications and experiences) and security. While mothers of dependent children want jobs that fit more closely with their childcare responsibilities, mothers whose children are older want full-time jobs or jobs with longer hours than those they currently held. These mothers are not constrained by childcare per se but are limited by employers' preconceived perceptions that all mothers are constrained by their childcare responsibilities; there appears to be a discrepancy between what mothers want and believe they are capable of doing as opposed to what employers believe they can do.

The participants in this study talked about 'starting over' in re-entry positions. In the literature mothers' returns to positions of lower status than the jobs they held before children is referred to as mothers' downward occupational mobility. Many mothers reported having more than one episode of starting over at the back of the queue. In addition these mothers also reported financial losses in terms of weekly and annual earnings (though the costs of not returning would be greater in terms of losses in personal disposable incomes).

This study was not set up to estimate the dollar losses of mothers' career breaks. Nevertheless, the accounts of the participants suggest that the low pay associated with jobs at the back of the queue has contributed to the mothers' loss of earnings. There are, of course, other costs such as stress (Nordenmark, 2002), but these are outside the scope of this study.

Barriers to returning to good jobs at the head of the queue

On the whole, unlike the situation in the 1980s and 1990s, when unemployment was higher, there appeared to be few barriers to returning to paid work, although sometimes mothers delayed re-entry due to factors beyond their control. However, these mothers generally returned to the back of the queue: many returners reported multiple re-entries into such positions. As indicated in Table 3 below, of the 26 mothers interviewed in individual interviews or focus groups, only four had not returned to paid work and all four were searching for work. Of the mothers who had returned, however, only three had achieved full-time, permanent employment. Nevertheless, all three mothers had spent many years doing low status re-entry jobs between re-entry and the time of the interview.

Of the remaining participants, five mothers held permanent part-time jobs, six mothers had temporary, part-time positions, and four had casual hours of work (mainly cleaning). Although four mothers are listed as holding multiple jobs, in reality, the figure is a little higher, since some of the mothers in permanent part-time work also held a number of casual hours' work in various capacities. The four mothers not in paid work at the time of the interviews participated in various non-paid work activities while searching for paid positions.

Table 3. Types of jobs participants held at time of interview

Job status	Full-time	Permanent part-time	S-Term part-time	Casual	Voluntary work	More than one job
No. of returners	3	5	6	4	4	4

Planning to return to paid work

However, it was not the case that the mothers in this study simply drifted into these jobs. Mothers who took part in this project planned their return as carefully as they could. All the mothers reported spending a lot of time and energy in planning a successful return to paid work. Their planning premises included their needs for childcare, retraining, and travel time. They looked around at the types of job options open to them.

Most of the mothers said they had a sort of timeline for re-entry that coincided with the time that the youngest child started school. Sometimes careful planning and unexpected opportunities presented themselves and made it easier for mothers to carry out their plans. The following mother explained:

I had planned that when [youngest child] goes to school, I'd give myself six months and then start looking for relief work. [Youngest child] was four-and-a-half when [a tertiary organisation] advertised a return-to-teaching course. It was for primary school teachers but I applied for it not expecting to get on ... but I got it... I had a degree in subjects with a high demand for teachers.

For most mothers, however, despite such careful planning, returning to good jobs further up the queue was often more complicated than they had envisaged.

Mothers' qualifications

As indicated above, all the mothers in the focus group were highly qualified. Cumulatively they displayed 30-40 years of paid work experience and held qualifications such as veterinarian (1), specialist health or education qualifications (2), specialist technician (1) and New Zealand postgraduate teaching certificate (1). Two of the three mothers who held specialist qualifications gained university degrees in

New Zealand while on their career breaks. These mothers all returned to short hours casual work, progressively going on to part-time employment of varying hours though mostly on ongoing contractual rather than permanent basis. Of the 21 mothers who were interviewed individually, five (5) held nursing qualifications, twelve held tertiary degrees, and four (4) had school-leaving certificates.

Mothers with low or no qualifications were more likely to report difficulties in returning. Of the four participants who were not in paid work at the time of the interview, three had no post-school qualifications, and one had trained and worked as a midwife before taking time out for children. These mothers recounted many unsuccessful attempts to secure decent employment (jobs usually associated with long-term full-time employment that paid well and had opportunities for career progress). They reported various incidents of “humiliating” encounters with employers and employer representatives, often matter-of-factly and sometimes with barely hidden anger.

After several unsuccessful attempts, two of these four mothers planned to become caregivers in old peoples’ homes. One mother said she was halfway through a training course for nursing aides. She was able to obtain financial assistance towards the cost of training through Work and Income New Zealand. She was, however, understandably angry at the many obstacles that she had to overcome to get access to such assistance, although both she and her husband were unemployed. She suggested that even after retraining, she would have to work her way up by accepting whatever pay and hours would be offered to her. She was in her fifties and felt that she would be lucky to return to full-time employment.

The second mother (whose husband was employed) was not eligible for state funded training courses. At the time of the interview, she was doing casual cleaning but planned to travel some distance in order to access a free computer course. She was in her late thirties and felt that she had some time to consider her options. At the time of the interview, she was also contemplating relocating with her husband for his job.

A third mother, who had a 17-year old disabled child, reported her hours were constrained by the need to provide care for her child. Although she had some

assistance towards training (free computer courses at a local institution, for instance), she felt it was highly improbable that she could find a paid job close to home and with the hours to fit in with care for her child. Nevertheless, she planned to get as much retraining as she could to better her employment chances. However, being older (she was in her late fifties/early sixties), she was not hopeful of gaining employment (full-time or part-time).

Nevertheless, contrary to human capital theories, mothers' re-entry employment did not appear to correlate highly with their investment in education. Both highly qualified and unqualified mothers were obliged to accept low status jobs. However, as in other studies (for example, Crompton & Sanderson, 1990), mothers with practitioner qualifications such as nursing and teaching had more opportunities to retrain or re-enter their professions. Trained teachers, for example, were able to return to relief teaching positions or fill in irregular teaching hours that childfree workers did not want. In some cases the pay was equivalent to full-time pay (paid on a pro-rata basis). Nevertheless, such jobs often had shorter hours and lower pay than normal, full-time positions. Further, they were often on temporary or short-term contracts. Employers of nurses and teachers appear able to create "niches for qualified practitioners" and use women as a relatively cheap but qualified and flexible reserve (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990b; Votinius, 2006).

Even highly qualified mothers with many years of paid work experience found re-entry less than straight forward. They were also more likely to report that they had considered having qualifications and previous paid work experience would stand them in good stead with employers. They reported then being surprised at how difficult it was to get the type of job or hours that they wanted.

The fourth mother who had not returned to paid work at the time of the interview was a qualified midwife who had been at the top of her occupation before taking a career break for children. She had planned to return to her profession when the children were older but had inadvertently taken a longer than expected break. When in paid work she had been the chief midwife in her town and while on a career break, had done a lot of voluntary work. She had, for instance, had a small business making and selling children's clothing. She felt she had a lot of life skills that she could offer but did not

know how to overcome the barriers that prevented her from using the skills while also being rewarded for them. She reported being unwilling to accept jobs that she felt did not recognize her skills and life experiences.

She reported various failed attempts at getting re-employed. In one instance, she tried to provide support to young mothers who had difficulties in establishing breastfeeding and to offer general nursing assistance. She had explored this option thoroughly, had contacted the local authorities and nearly had a unit set up. Unfortunately the scheme fell through for lack of adequate funding. Despite this, she continued to make numerous attempts to gain employment before deciding that she had “left it too late”.

For mothers of very young children, even the possession of highly sought after qualifications (such as veterinarian, scientist, planner) did not provide them with enough bargaining power to negotiate for better jobs further up the queue. Often childcare constraints meant that they too accepted the low status jobs they were offered. Such difficulties led several highly skilled mothers to accept cleaning jobs as a first step to re-entry because such jobs could be more easily fitted around childcare. In most cases, participants were offered and had to accept part-time, often temporary employment.

Returning to the back of the queue and occupational mobility

Prior to taking career breaks, the mothers in this study had had jobs such as town planner, consultant (one at international level), veterinarian, medical scientist, teacher, disability health specialist, registered nurse, school principal, as well as typist/clerk and other semi-skilled occupations. All had been in full-time employment.

Upon returning all the mothers, regardless of qualifications and educational achievement, experienced occupational downgrading. Most mothers' re-entry occupations were at lower levels than they had occupied before having children. For instance, returners who held clerical positions before children typically returned to shop assistant or cleaning jobs. Mothers' downward occupational mobility is often made worse by a lack of career progress associated with the difficulties of moving from part-time jobs to better positions further up the queue.

Although a few participants were able to return to jobs at the same level as the ones they left, these jobs were often part-time and temporary. Even participants who had previously acquired expertise in professional fields such as scientist and/or consultant reported being offered only part-time employment of lower status than they had before having children. Further, these mothers reported experiencing a loss of career opportunities, which they felt would not have occurred if they had remained childless.

Participants generally found that despite having industry-specific skills and experience, employers' assumptions that career breaks were associated with skill deterioration made it difficult to return to the same profession. In consultancy work, for instance, it was often assumed that skills become obsolete very quickly. The following participant, for example, found that despite having a successful work record in international consultancy, she was not able to obtain employment in her area of expertise. Instead she was obliged to accept a low status job as a laboratory assistant. She said:

I started in the lab as a back up and seven years later I'm working in labs and hating it even more so. I felt like it [career break] was at great cost to me, and the career path that I was on.

Mothers who took more than one employment break or who relocated for partners' jobs often suffered more than one episode of 'starting-over'. One mother had had her career interrupted several times and at the time of the interview, had returned to postgraduate studies in a different field. She suggested that being even older at completion of her studies, she would more likely have to 'start over' again. She explained:

I've gone to the bottom several times because I was at the top of my scale before we came here [New Zealand] and I had ten years out... I went back part-time and I went back to the bottom.

Typically returners were able to identify shared experiences from among their peers and would often add their stories to their own account. In the focus group, especially,

mothers were often reminded of friends or acquaintances in similar situations. One mother cited the following example:

I know of a woman [with tertiary qualifications and paid work experience] who had been out of the workforce but had good qualifications and a good job before then. And she went back into casual work... She did that for a few years – you know when they wanted her they just rang her.

The low status of their re-entry jobs affected participants' views about taking career breaks for children. Highly skilled participants would often compare their current living standard with that of their former colleagues (in continuous employment) and expressed deep regret at the loss of their careers and associated losses of privileges and sense of wellness and being in control.

In most liberal nations, although childfree people may not necessarily be happier than families with children, nevertheless, it does appear that working mothers and their children are likely to have a much lower standard of living than non-parents with similar qualifications, skills and work experiences (Ginn, Street & Arber, 2001; Hochschild, 1997). The mothers in this study suggested that their current low status employment meant they would not ever catch up with their former colleagues in terms of career, income or lifestyle. One mother explained:

I look at other people who didn't take time out and they do have certain advantages in terms of career and opportunities ... now there is no way that in the rest of my career I could ever catch up to where I left off. I had a good responsible job that I gave up for my children and I still haven't got to that level after ten (10) years back in the workforce.

Another highly skilled participant added:

Other people (the same age as us and with similar jobs) went back to work pretty much straight away or they hadn't had children and their standard of living is so much higher than mine ... Some of them have got a very high standard of living, going off somewhere for the weekends, lots of champagne.

The difficulty of moving from part-time/temporary positions into full-time or permanent positions contributed to these returners' loss of career. Part-time positions are not conducive to career progress, as discussed in Chapter Two. As the following participant (operational consultant) said:

My career has not progressed from when I was 26 and leaving work to have my son to now going on 45. I'm at the same place structurally as I was 19 years ago.

As discussed in Chapter Two, female-dominated jobs tend to have short career ladders and even women who do not have children will face limited career progress in such jobs, especially if they do not have tertiary qualifications. Nevertheless, all but four of the participants in this study were highly skilled and had tertiary (some at post-tertiary level) qualifications. It could be expected that their qualifications and paid work experiences would have contributed to their continuing career progress had they not taken time out for having children. However, as the case of the following mother illustrates, this was not the case for most of the participants in this study. The participant explained:

I'm a senior tutor and I cannot be anything else ... I have actually got quite a long list of publications but they don't count...there is actually no way that I can get out of the rut that I am actually in...tutors aren't meant to do research but if I ever want to get out of being a tutor, I would have to do research.

In the New Zealand universities, women, especially mothers, are more likely than men to be appointed below the career grades (lecturer or above) and are instead recruited as tutors, senior tutors or assistant lecturers (Briar, 2007, forthcoming). Moving from a tutorship to a lectureship is not possible, even though at one institution it appeared that some tutors essentially performed the same tasks as a lecturer, namely being in charge of whole teaching units. Another tutor explained:

There is a case where a technician can become a tutor but not one where a tutor can become a lecturer as a natural career progress. To cross over into the lecturer path would mean my department creating a new lectureship and

justifying it. They could do that and then I would have to apply for it and there might be quite a bit of competition there. And it would be for the job that I am basically doing now.

Such structural barriers constrained returners' career prospects and made it difficult to achieve pre-childbirth careers. Most participants found that despite having been in paid work for over a decade, they had not returned to the level that they had reached prior to taking a career break. Again, when they compared themselves to previous colleagues (who continued with paid work) they felt their career had lagged behind those of their former colleagues. Many participants suggested that women who were prepared to sacrifice family life to a greater extent (by not taking extended career breaks, for instance) progressed further compared to those who took extended career breaks. As one mother explained:

Sometimes I look back and I think I could have done a lot better than what I have...I have a friend who's now the boss of all the regional offices. But she, during her marriage, commuted long distance between the South Island and the North Island, where her husband was based. She would have had her children in childcare.

This participant found that although she had now reached a higher level in her job, it had taken her a very long time to get there. She said:

After I returned I just kept working. I've been in the same school for 25 years. Recently, I applied for senior teacher (HOD) position and it took me another six years to get it [after also paying for and acquiring degree equivalent qualifications].

The long hours that accompany positions of responsibility and authority also make it difficult for mothers to achieve promotions, even if they are eligible to apply for promotions. Participants with very young children suggested that they were not able to take senior posts because promotions would require long hours and more responsibility, which would impose higher demands on mothers who already had long hours due to their childcare and other family obligations. One mother explained:

A lot of women don't take advantage of promotions because of the workload they have at home. The obstacles are much greater unless you are willing to put work before family because you don't have the energy to do work and home with the extra demands that promotions would entail.

For most mothers in this study, a strong sense of obligation to place care of children and family ahead of paid work limited their paid work opportunities. These mothers were obliged to take extended career breaks for children predominantly because at the time that they were starting families, there was little public support for childcare or paid parental leave. However, extended breaks made it more difficult to return to good jobs at the head of the queue. Of the 26 mothers, only three participants had achieved upward mobility at the time of the interview.

Upward occupational mobility

Achieving upward mobility for the returners in this study is rare but not impossible. For this to happen, however, returners have to be supported to retrain while they are on career breaks. In New Zealand, at the time of the study, access to publicly funded training opportunities was available only to (sole) mothers on the benefit system.

Three of the (Maori) sole mothers were in full-time employment at a higher level than they had held before having children and taking employment breaks. They were able to make use of state-funded re-training schemes such as the Training Incentive Allowance (TIA) while on career breaks for children. One of these mothers progressed to a middle management position and subsequently qualified with post-tertiary qualifications. She was optimistic about her career progressing further. She explained:

After my first degree I got a job at a government agency monitoring contracts for community funding agencies. Then I became a research manager and the job entailed further training so I then completed my MBA and now I'm lecturing and doing my PhD and will apply for a promotion when I get it.

The second mother was working full-time before her first child was born. During her childbearing years, she took intermittent breaks and returned to casual jobs before

participating in the state-funded TIA Scheme. After retraining she returned to full-time employment at a higher level, doing community health and social work at a doctor's clinic with a "good salary and perks." The third mother had a good administrative position before having children. Her re-entry to paid work was into full-time employment in a secretarial position before participating in various training schemes. This led her to a higher management position where she was in charge of various paid work-related schemes in her community.

In addition to state support while in receipt of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB), these mothers also had extensive family support with childcare. Further, it must also be noted that while these three participants displayed upward mobility, they also had multiple re-entries to low-paid and casual positions before accessing the return-to-work schemes. As with other participants, while they had childcare responsibility, their paid work was largely intermittent and of low status. The significant factor that led to their career advancement was the state TIA schemes that they were able to access at a relatively early stage in their employment history. Their subsequent success in the labour market is strong testimony to the significance of state assistance for mothers to access career type jobs at the head of the job queue.

This is not, however, the whole story. In addition to occupational downgrading and loss of career, the mothers in this study also reported a loss of earnings associated with the years out of paid employment, being employed for fewer hours, lower earnings from loss of employment experience and generally lower pay from low paid part-time jobs. In addition, the participants in this study also reported additional costs associated with childcare, training and other job-search costs, which further reduce their take-home pay.

Factors leading to mothers' loss of earnings

Low pay in re-entry jobs

The participants reported a significant loss of earning potential after taking career breaks for children. They suggested that employers assumed returners did not have paid work-related skills and were more likely to assign them to jobs that generally did not require training. Employers were then able to offer flexibility with low pay.

Nevertheless, many returners were offered flexible hours with low pay even for jobs that required more skills.

Participants, on the whole, were obliged to accept this trade-off. Some participants indicated that they expected to have to accept lower positions with lower pay on first re-entry. Even highly skilled mothers suggested that their extended career breaks would justify lower pay, especially if employers had to pay to train/retrain them. A mother who had trained and worked as a veterinarian before ceasing her practice said:

My skills had deteriorated to such a level that it was reasonable to accept a lower pay, especially as management [current employing firm] was arranging for me to observe a vet practice in order to re-acquaint myself with current vet practice... but if I hadn't take time out, I would have done better.

Nevertheless, the mothers, especially those who had been in high paid jobs before taking a career break, did not expect to be paid as low as they were, given their skills and previous paid work experiences. These participants often expressed surprise at the pay that they were offered, but also felt obliged to accept such jobs for lack of better alternatives. One participant explained:

This last job I applied for was supposed to be in planning. But when I got the job they told me the salary was \$23,000 per year. It was a part-time position and I thought that's quite good money. But when I started they said I'd only get half of it. And I had assumed the full amount because when I was consulting [in the 1980s] I got paid \$30 an hour.

Low pay in part-time work: difficult to move onto higher paying jobs

The experiences of the mothers in this study suggest that it is difficult to make the transition from part-time to full-time jobs, and even harder to do so from a casual employment position. Apart from the three participants who, after achieving higher qualifications, were able to progress to full-time and higher status jobs, most of the participants were confined to these low paid positions, contributing to a significant loss of earnings. These participants reported they were not able to command the pay they had before taking a career break. Even when they had been in paid work for a

long time (some for over a decade), the difficulty of moving to a full-time position made it difficult to increase their earnings. As one participant noted:

In terms of how far I've come, I still don't earn as much as I earned in 1986 as a part-time consultant...financially I've not gained anything ...I've got this thought at the back of my mind that I've got two degrees and I get paid a pittance...I don't think my pay reflects my experiences and qualifications.

Most of the participants returned to jobs in teaching, education and health. While these jobs offer some opportunities for career development and pay rises they are often less well paid than jobs in male-dominated professions. Further, most of these mothers had returned to part-time positions that typically do not have career structures where the earning capacity can improve. Even highly skilled returners in such jobs failed to regain full-time jobs with high pay. Often it was the title and level of the job that determined the pay, not the level of qualifications or skills that the jobholder had. As one mother said, "I'm on this wage scale no matter how good my skills are, no matter how many publications...it's totally unfair." Even for returners who had acquired more skills and experience on-the-job, the situation was not much better.

Not being paid commensurately with qualifications

Highly skilled participants who had relocated for their partners' careers often found that they lost seniority as well as pay by moving into part-time/casual employment. This was also a problem for mothers who had been recruited to New Zealand for their specialist expertise. In these cases, the mothers had not been able to obtain competitive salaries commensurate with their qualifications and experience. In accepting lower occupational levels and shorter or infrequent hours of employment, these mothers found that they had lost much of their earning power. Most of the mothers in this study were over-qualified for the jobs they did and so did not earn the incomes that could have been possible had they stayed in full-time employment and progressed in their careers. As one mother explained:

I was recruited to New Zealand because I had specialist training but when I had been out of the job market I went back to different jobs... This year I

managed to get back in the same field but the pay is so low I have to have other jobs. Before that I had four part-time jobs, now I have three jobs.

These mothers often compared their financial situation to that of colleagues who had continuous full-time employment. As indicated above, they were often quite surprised by the differences in pay and lifestyles between them and their one-time colleagues and suggested that the lost years (career breaks) were a key factor in making their current position less favourable. The following highly skilled participant, who had migrated to New Zealand, explained:

There's a huge difference between my peers in England and me. They've got great careers, lots of money, social life. And I thought, 'God where did I go wrong?'

Participants felt that employers regarded them all as the same kind of labour, namely women (with partners earning relatively good incomes) who just wanted a 'little job'. As one mother said, "they lump all women [sole wage earners and those with financially able partners] together" and treat them as "happy to be employed for a relatively low wage." However, mothers themselves did not agree. Some of the returners in this study were the main breadwinners, who found their low pay insufficient to support a family despite resorting to multiple jobs, creating further stress. Participants on temporary contracts were particularly vulnerable. As one mother explained:

I wasn't paid in the semester breaks. I was told I would be because I'm the breadwinner, and I wasn't. I just about went under. It's only thanks to my mother-in-law that we still have a roof over our heads.

Loss of lifetime earnings associated with extended career breaks

In liberal nations, the cost of children is seen as a private cost. Some participants in this study appeared to internalise this view. One participant, for example, said she accepted her financial loss because it was her choice to stay at home. But when probed, she suggested that it was the lack of childcare and her husband's relocation that led her to interrupt her career. Her inability to find the kind of childcare (provided

by the extended family) that she believed to be the best for her children, contributed to her staying home full-time and delaying her return to employment. She was not unaware of the financial costs to her of taking an extended career break. She explained:

Ten years out of [paid] work was a huge sacrifice financially with the loss in income and life style though it was my choice to stay at home...having no family support there [where her husband's new job was located], I just didn't feel comfortable being dependent on childcare. That was it basically. As I said I made the choice but even so I found it very difficult. I think under different circumstances, I would have liked to do some part-time work just to keep my hands in the job market.

Low pay made it difficult for mothers to afford quality childcare, to save or to become economically independent. Low-income participants especially reported that they needed multiple jobs just to boost their incomes. Although this study was not set up to calculate the motherhood penalty, research suggests that in New Zealand the motherhood penalty could be as high as 7-10 percent of the gross hourly rate paid to women 25 years and over (Dixon, 2000; OECD, 2004, p. 75). This does not take account of losses due to working part-time (contributing to lower weekly, annual and lifetime earnings), costs of childcare, retraining and other costs associated with job search costs, as identified by the participants in this study.

Costs of childcare

As indicated in Chapter Three, childcare costs are a major factor mediating mothers' employment. Currently the Working for Families package aims to provide 20 hours of free early childhood education for children 3-4 years old. As indicated earlier in this thesis, the implementation of this policy is less than straightforward. Nevertheless, increased support for mothers in terms of childcare facilities, financial allowances towards children such as child-related tax credits, is likely to ease the costs of childcare for some current and future mothers. However, at the time of the interview, there was limited public funding for childcare and this made childcare (including after-school-care) very expensive for most participants and was a significant factor delaying their re-entry to the paid work force.

Further, as the mothers tended to pay for childcare out of their own incomes, the low pay in most part-time jobs meant that childcare costs could easily take away all the financial benefits of paid work. The mothers who kept working despite the high costs of childcare reported they could do so only because they were able to depend on the relatively high and regular incomes of their spouses. One mother said she returned to brief, low-paid, casual jobs in between children but did not believe women without access to another income could afford to make such 'choices'. She explained:

I had a caregiver in the home looking after the baby...I was earning \$50 a week clear in my hand and it was costing me \$55 a week for the nanny and people couldn't understand why I was doing it since there was no money to be gained out of it.

Participants who used informal childcare provided by family and friends reported that they did not have to pay or only paid a small cost for childcare. Nevertheless, they felt indebted to such an extent that they often reciprocated in kind. Such reciprocations took the form of return childcare favours, token payments towards the cost of children's food as well as gifts. For mothers on low incomes, these extra expenses, also identified in a British research on returners as long ago as the 1980s (Rothwell, 1980, p. 213), added to mothers' financial outlay in returning.

Cost of (re) training

In addition to childcare costs, these mothers also had to pay for the cost of retraining. Mothers who could not afford to retrain were more likely to delay returning or be obliged to accept low status jobs at the back of the queue. Further, participants in rural areas faced additional costs since most training facilities are in bigger centres, and so added transport and childcare costs to the total retraining costs. The general feeling among returners, especially those on lower incomes, was, "It's all in the too hard basket." Further, since the time that these mothers returned to the paid workforce, the costs of training have continued to rise, making it harder for returners to access good jobs.

Although partnered participants could and often had to ask for financial assistance from their partners, many mothers were reluctant to ask for such help. Further, while

it was possible for mothers to borrow money from financial institutions or resort to student loans, most mothers did not feel justified in getting loans because they did not feel that retraining would guarantee them a job that paid enough to pay back such loans. As one participant explained, "Even if you do get a job after training you don't know if you're going to be rewarded for having those skills." Another mother who wanted to train as a call centre employee said it would cost her \$1600 to do so (2002 figures). On top of that she would need to get a computer and asked, "What if I don't like the job? What if I fail?" Older participants especially suggested that taking loans would add an extra financial burden on the household, given that most partnered participants had mortgage expenses as well. As one mother explains:

When I went to teachers college, I would have had to take a student loan if my husband was not on a good income...but how many people want to have a student loan at a later stage in life when things with providing for children such as school fees, uniforms and so on are huge and we're being told to save for our future?

Participants reported that having to take on additional loans at a later stage in life made them feel more vulnerable. For instance, one participant said both she and her husband (who was made redundant) had to take student loans in order to retrain. While she was able to return to part-time employment, her husband had not obtained a job at the time of the interview. She estimated her husband's combined income from a student loan and allowance did not add up to what he could have got had he been in receipt of an unemployment benefit. Her total household debts, including the house mortgage, placed the family in a precarious financial position. As the main earner in her household, she also felt vulnerable in her paid work position. She likened the effects of taking a student loan to "trying to walk on water; you really don't know if you're going to sink or swim." The participant clearly feared she was going to sink.

Costs of job search

As well as the costs of retraining, the participants, especially those on low incomes, identified other costs related to job search. While these costs might appear minimal for individuals on a good income, such costs added to the total costs of job search, further complicating mothers' re-entry attempts.

Participants identified such costs as work-appropriate clothing expenses, transport costs to and from interview venues, costs of printing curriculum vita and letters of application and postage as affecting re-entry, although they noted that the costs associated with casual employment (as in the cleaning industry) tended not to be so high. Even partnered returners whose husbands had good incomes reported being uncomfortable with having to spend on getting work-ready attire. While there are places where low cost work attire can be hired or purchased in some cities such as Wellington, for mothers in smaller areas, such facilities are not often available. As the following mother explained, while at home, women do not usually spend money on themselves:

When you start working again, in a proper job, you have to buy new clothes, whereas when you're a mother at home you wear baggy t-shirts and stretchy pants, and you certainly won't spend money on yourself because it wasn't really important.

Another participant added:

It was quite expensive actually. I mean even having to buy some new shoes and things. It can be very expensive.

Clearly returning to paid work is neither easy nor cheap. These mothers had clearly been very proactive in planning and pursuing paid work. However, although planning helped, all the mothers were affected to varying degrees by external factors beyond their control. Such factors will be discussed in the next chapter.

Summary and discussion

The accounts of participants in this study suggest that on the whole, mothers who wanted to return to paid work were able to do so. Unlike twenty, or even ten years previously (Myrdal & Klein, 1956, pp. 146-14; Martin & Roberts, 1984), there appear to be no significant barriers to returning to paid work. However, participants generally returned to low status jobs at the back of the queue rather than careers. All the mothers in this study experienced downward occupational mobility. This is in line with other research findings on returners. Research in the 1980s, for instance, found

that mothers, especially if they had more than one child, suffered downward occupational downgrading after children (Dex, 1987, 1990; Elias, 1988; Yohalem, 1979 and 1980). More recent research suggests that mothers as a group suffer more experiences of downward occupational mobility (read 'starting over' for New Zealand returners) while childfree women were more upwardly mobile (Brannen & Moss, 1991, pp. 55-68; Joshi, Paci and Waldfogel, 1999, pp. 543-564; OECD, 2002).

Further, although participants with occupational qualifications such as teachers and nurses were more likely to return to same status occupations, they were equally as likely to be offered part-time and temporary work as participants with less firm-specific qualifications. On the whole, the study suggests that both highly skilled participants and participants without qualifications were offered low status jobs at the back of the queue. Contrary to research findings in the 1980s, when qualifications appeared to make a difference (Dale, 1987; Dex, 1987, pp. 72-98; Dex & Shaw, 1986; Gitter, Shaw & Gagen, 1986; Stewart & Greenhalgh, 1984, pp. 493-519; McRae, 1993), the current study suggests that the higher educational achievements of contemporary mothers imply that qualifications alone cannot explain returners' occupational downgrading.

The mothers in this study reported having a timeline for returning to employment. However, despite careful planning and proactive strategies to regain employment, the mothers were largely confined to low status jobs at the back of the queue. Most participants reported being offered part-time or casual jobs where they had to start over at the back of the queue, and many reported more than one episode of 'starting over', each time returning to the back of the queue. This affected their career opportunities as well as pay. All participants reported earning significantly less than they could have had they stayed in full-time and continuous employment. Further, these mothers incurred additional financial costs due to having to pay for childcare, retraining courses, work clothes and other costs related to job search, such as printing and postage.

Research suggests that individuals in low status jobs find it difficult to plan for the future: they have more difficulties in raising bank loans to buy or rent a house, for instance (Votinius, 2006, pp. 265-268). In the current study some mothers reported

having to take student loans to fund training courses. However, taking a student loan reduces the take home pay and makes mothers more vulnerable to poverty. In New Zealand, research suggests that female students take longer to repay their loans than their male counterparts. Further, for mothers of dependent children, their primary responsibility for caregiving makes it difficult for them to pursue good jobs with high pay, since such jobs generally require long hours. (Gordon & Morton, 2001; Stanley-Clarke, 2000, pp. 128-130).

This chapter has discussed mothers' re-entry employment: participants had to start over in re-entry positions at the back of the queue. Support for mothers in terms of childcare and child allowances as well as child tax credits are important to assist mothers into career type jobs at the head of the queue. While increasing policy support for mothers through the Working for Families package will make it easier for some current and future mothers to return to paid work, there is scope for such support to include financial support towards the costs of retraining and other job search-related costs that the mothers in this study has identified. In the next chapter, the processes that lead to employers' placement of mothers to low status positions at the back of the queue will be discussed.

CHAPTER SEVEN: QUEUEING PROCESSES: THE FACTORS

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the factors that contribute to the processes whereby returners are assigned the lowest occupational position at the back of the queue. In Chapter One I suggested that mothers' decisions to interrupt their careers were influenced by the social obligation to care.

Nevertheless, as indicated in the previous chapter, despite having limited choices the mothers in this study were very proactive in their efforts to regain some of the power and control that they had when they had previously been in paid work. Their comments reflect the complexity of returning to paid work. In this chapter I consider both social and economic factors, and suggest that both factors contribute to the relegation of these mothers to the least preferred jobs at the back of the queue. These mothers, as do mothers in most industrialised nations, were obliged to make 'choices' within various constraints outside their control.

Social factors

The mothers in this study placed childcare and family work over their own career. Participants suggested they 'chose' part-time jobs nearer the home so that they were not seen as abdicating home responsibilities by taking jobs that required long hours away from home. They also reported prioritising their partners' careers over their own employment. In most cases, the husbands/partners (mostly in better jobs at the head of the queue) also earned more and had more bargaining power. The weaker bargaining power of these mothers obliged them to place their partners' jobs ahead of their own even if such considerations meant they had to relocate at the expense of their own careers.

Husbands and partners

Several mothers relocated with their husbands despite being on a good career path themselves. This included migrating to New Zealand from other countries as well as relocating to other cities within New Zealand. In some cases where the husbands were required to move on a regular basis, the mothers also found it easier to focus on the husbands' careers.

Nevertheless, by interrupting their own paid work, these mothers found themselves involuntarily unemployed. While this might protect the employment of their partners, the sacrifices that these mothers made in regard to their own employment did not seem to benefit them in the long term. The arrangement did not provide mothers with choice so much as a social obligation to maintain the role of main childcare provider (Badgett & Folbre, 2001). While they reported that their employment breaks were beneficial for their families, in the long term, they expressed a sense of regret for their own broken careers. Relocating often meant that it was extremely hard if not totally impossible to get another job in the same field, let alone at the same level. In the majority of such cases, participants said they accepted casual or temporary part-time jobs when they were offered, or volunteered for community work.

Further, when planning to return, partnered mothers needed help from their husbands or partners, not just in assisting with childcare but also in making the transition to paid work easier. However, most of the participants had husbands/partners who were in full-time jobs and were not always available to help with childcare and other domestic tasks. While self-employed husbands appeared more likely to be able to help, such help was often sporadic and short-term.

In most cases, the partners appeared to expect that the mothers combine paid work and home responsibilities in such a way that the home environment remained as unchanged as possible. Participants claimed that their partners expected them to organise and pay for childcare. Further, they suggested that their partners wanted them to ensure the domestic chores continued to be done in such a way that their (partners') routines were minimally disturbed and they did not have to take on their wives' unpaid childcare and domestic tasks. One mother explained:

When I was looking at working my husband and I had a good talk about it and made sure that *he* [my italics] wasn't going to have to carry too much of the work with children for what I wanted to do.

Some partnered participants who were registered nurses got around the problem of childcare by working evening and night shifts since such hours meant they could still be home with children during the day. A few mothers reported they took work home

to complete after the rest of the family had been attended to (mainly between evening and bedtime). This made the day very long for returners and contributed to the spill over of paid work into the home (Cullen, Kordey, Schmidt & Gaboardi, 2003; Hochschild, 1990 and 1997; Osbourne, 1991).

Participants (especially in the focus group) suggested that wives and mothers took on disproportionate amounts of domestic chores because husbands were less willing to share in the load. They commented on various strategies that husbands/partners used to get out of doing housework, such as pretending that they did not know how, or could not do as good a job as their wives. Participants suggested their husbands/partners preferred to think that household tasks got done despite their lack of participation. As one participant said:

Husbands don't know the amount of work that is needed to keep the home working smoothly and efficiently. They think there's an invisible little helper who mysteriously went to the shops, brought all the groceries home, got them sorted out and restocked everything when they run out.

Another participant added:

We expect mothers to do all the domestic tasks whereas my husband's life hasn't changed much [after marriage and children].

For participants who were sole mothers, the lack of support in combining paid and unpaid work could be summed up as one mother put it, "You're it!" However, for all participants the unequal division of labour meant participants often had very long days. This affected their employment opportunities. Many participants reported missing out on employment opportunities simply through the sheer lack of time and energy. As one participant explained:

It's difficult to follow up on other jobs when you're so busy doing all these other things. Sometimes I think if I'd been more aware of what was going on I could have stood a better chance of competing with the others.

Other participants felt caught between childcare and paid work. When mothers spent long hours in paid work, they also reported ongoing guilt at not being home with their children. This seemed to be a major issue even when the participants did not take longer hours of paid work until the youngest child was older than ten. The following mother suggested she felt very guilty because she felt her youngest son was disadvantaged by her paid work, although she did not continue in full-time work for long:

When I went full-time teaching my older boy was twelve and the younger one nine. I didn't actually think that the younger one needed me all the time. I realised now that he did because he does make all sorts of comments about how he was never important enough and I was late picking him up. And I feel guilty about that.

Another mother added:

I feel really torn because I put all I can into my work and want to do well at it. But then there are demands of home. I mean my daughter is fourteen and she might leave home in a few years time. So I want to do the best by her and encourage her to do well at school as well as encourage her in social activities. It all takes time.

Support from the extended family

A lack of support from the extended family also contributed to delayed re-entry. Some participants found they could not depend on extended family members either because they lived too far away (in some cases overseas) or they had childcare responsibilities themselves or they were in long paid work hours. In many cases, mothers reported they would have returned sooner if they had had some family support. As one mother explained:

I probably would have done some work during those ten years but for the fact that when my first child was ten months we moved to another country.

For other participants, even when an extended family member lived close, by it was often difficult to ask for help. Most mothers felt they should be able to cope on their own. While the availability of good quality and affordable childcare helped, often the lack of it contributed to delayed re-entry. The mothers in this study wanted to ensure, as far as possible, that their children were not disadvantaged by their paid work. Any negative experience with childcare providers potentially led to mothers' delaying returning. As the following mother commented:

I had a very bad experience with [childcare centre] but we couldn't afford the better quality childcare at other places...and childcare was always a problem.

Participants without family help were more likely to accept flexible work at the back of the queue. However, even with family support, combining paid work and childcare was not easy. One participant who went back to full-time teaching found even with the help of a very supportive husband, she could not cope with the long hours on top of her usual unpaid workload. She felt her health was affected to a degree where the only way out was for her to take a second career break. She explained:

I didn't have the pressing problem of childcare because teaching hours coincided with the children's after school hours and I had a very supportive husband. But the very long total hours of teaching, then coming home and cooking, chasing after the children and their homework, washing and all the other household chores were killing me.

While the participants referred to the decision to take part-time or casual employment as a 'choice' they had made, in reality, such employment was not their employment of first choice. The significant difficulties they expressed at obtaining the kind of employment that they preferred, despite having good qualifications suggested that other factors have contributed to the processes that relegated them to the back of the queue. These factors significantly disrupted the careful planning that mothers had made towards gainful employment at the head of or further up the queue.

Labour market conditions

To some extent, mothers' re-entry success depended on the labour market conditions that they returned to. In areas where employment opportunities were more available (as in larger towns), mothers reported being able to return sooner. However, in smaller, rural areas, mothers reported finding it difficult even to obtain casual cleaning jobs.

Employment opportunities

In the present buoyant job market, current and future mothers returning to paid work have better employment opportunities. For the participants in the current study, however, access to good jobs, especially in smaller towns and rural areas, was limited and made returning less than straightforward. Although individuals living in remote and rural areas can be said to be constrained by employment opportunities in such areas, the job queues/gender queues model suggests that returners as the least preferred occupational group, would be more likely to be hired last.

Most participants said they took part-time and temporary employment at the back of the queue because it was all that they were offered. For these participants, the jobs that they held were not those that they would have preferred had there been more choices available to them. All the participants wanted jobs that would provide them with good pay, employment security and opportunities for career development. Even participants in good part-time positions (with good pay and pro-rata benefits) expressed a desire for full-time hours, or longer part-time hours, as well as permanent positions. However, most accepted jobs as they were offered to them, with flexibility dictated by the needs of the employers, and not their needs to fit in childcare. As one mother in a focus group explained:

It's just like when they offer you a few hours here and there and you say, 'thank you', instead of 'excuse me!'

Participants were acutely aware that there was competition even for low status jobs. Jobs with hours that fit in with childcare needs are in high demand among mothers with dependent children, so that mothers felt if they did not accept a job, it would be

offered to the next person in the job queue. Further, they were fearful that if they did not accept jobs when they were offered, they might not be given such opportunities again. This constraint contributed to the earlier than planned return of some mothers. As one trained teacher said:

I approached [school] and said if he [principal] was desperate for a reliever, to give me a ring...I probably picked up something like ten or twelve days of work just before the end of that school term, although I had said that I was not available till he [child] goes to school...I got rang up a day after he [child] started school. I stayed at that school for two to three years.

The mothers who reported returning earlier than planned also reported staying in such jobs for longer, as in the case of the example above. Often this was not by choice but because once in a job, it was difficult to negotiate for better conditions. In addition, the relatively high unemployment rate at the time they were returning made these mothers determined to hold on to the jobs that they had.

Work-related networks

For many mothers, taking employment breaks led to the loss of work-related networks and this made it difficult to find out about job opportunities and to locate information relevant to the job market. The more extended the break the more likely the participants were to lose work-related contacts. Mothers who had had extended breaks were more likely to report being disadvantaged by employers' preference for individuals with experience or knowledge about current workplace practices. On the whole, mothers with work-related contacts were more likely to report being offered jobs than those without. After many attempts to gain decent employment, one mother suggested that her loss of contact with the paid workforce meant she did not know where to go to find information relevant to her profession. She said:

I wasn't savvy enough to realize that if I'd offered to pay for that up-skilling, I would probably have got it [the job]. But I didn't know enough to keep in touch [with the paid work environment]...

This was a sentiment shared by many, especially older mothers, in both the group and individual interviews. By contrast, mothers with work-related contacts reported that they returned sooner than they had planned because job opportunities presented themselves through such contacts. Some participants reported using informal contacts such as friends and relatives to seek information about job opportunities when they contemplated returning. Several participants said they made job inquiries at workplaces (cold calls) when they were told of upcoming positions. Other mothers claimed they were invited (by employers) to apply for available positions because employers had heard about them through mutual contacts.

This was especially true in areas where there was a skills shortage, as in health and education. One participant in a rural area said she was never short of offers for casual hours of work because of her status as a registered nurse. She said, "I get phone calls every day to come in and do a few hours for the nursing home." She was also able to get training-on-the-job for a supervisory position and hours more closely aligned to her childcare needs, explaining that it was because registered nurses were in very scarce supply in her area.

However, such jobs did not lead to regaining a career. Even highly skilled participants found employers were more likely to use them as skilled labour to meet fluctuating demands and less likely to offer options leading to a career. Several participants reported employers' reluctance to make them permanent or increase their paid work hours, despite an obvious need for their specialist skills. Many mothers reported being stuck in part-time employment, despite numerous attempts to get into full-time employment, many years after initial re-entry. As one mother said, "They [employers] rang me up and said they were desperate for a couple of hours a day...but it was very, very difficult to get back into my chosen career". Such workplace structures constrained mothers' career prospects, making it difficult to progress from part-time to full-time employment.

Workplace constraints

Employers' beliefs, policies and practices created significant barriers to the participants' ability to obtain good jobs. Employers' assumptions about the skills that mothers brought to the workplace, for example, influenced the types of jobs that they

offered returners. Although mothers who took short maternity leave would not necessarily have lost their skills, employers frequently viewed their qualifications and skills as out-dated. These mothers were then more likely to be offered low status jobs at back of the queue since these jobs often do not require high skills, qualifications or training.

Recognition of unpaid work-related skills

Most participants had gained valuable skills through voluntary work in the community. Many participants had experiences in leadership positions, such as treasurer or chairperson of school boards of trustees, convenors for conferences, or supervisors of play-centre activities. One participant had been in sole charge of a large building project costing around \$80,000. Such positions carried considerable responsibility, contributing to a participant's leadership and organisational skills. However, participants felt that employers did not value such informally gained skills. This pressured mothers to acquire retraining or training in new areas, adding further costs and for some, leading to delayed re-entry.

Some mothers suggested that employers believed informally acquired skills benefited women personally but did not necessarily lead to increased productivity in the workplace. Participants generally felt that employers did not understand how skilled they were or could become with some retraining. As the following mother said:

I don't believe that people who make the decision have any idea of the skills that women gain from volunteer work.

Another participant added:

Many mothers have got so many skills. They have to juggle so many things...they have the skills to interact with many people that their child has to interact with. There are conflicts with children that they have to sort out so surely they're good at conflict resolution and at supporting other mothers in the workplace... Employers don't see those things.

These findings are similar to findings from other New Zealand research that suggests motherhood-related skills are undervalued (see Mason, 1998 and 2000, for example). Mothers' perception that employers did not recognise their skills affected their sense of confidence and undermined their bargaining power in the workplace. Although most mothers could easily identify the skills they possessed, they were often reluctant to use these skills to support their job applications or to negotiate for better terms and conditions, because they felt employers would only accept skills and qualifications obtained through formal channels. In addition, participants reported facing further obstacles due to the actions of employer representatives who vetted job applicants for the employing organisations. Mothers frequently referred to these individuals as gatekeepers.

Gatekeepers

First line supervisors, managers or other individuals who acted in place of the employing organisations were often the individuals that mothers first approached. This first point of contact was also a point of elimination from the job market for many participants. The actions (or failure to take action) of gatekeepers influenced whether mothers could enter the organisation. Participants' comments such as "I don't think he actually submitted the application" or "I think they just chucked my CV in the bin," suggested participants felt their job applications were unsuccessful because they did not reach the final decision-maker.

This is also the point at which the mothers reported the most acute sense of employer discrimination. Although they did not identify it as such, the negative communication and vibes that they sensed from such contact persons made it clear to mothers that they were not the preferred candidates for jobs. Older mothers especially felt that the gatekeepers regarded them as too old. They felt that the gatekeepers did not take their job applications seriously. They were essentially the least preferred occupational group.

One older mother recounted the rudeness and negative attitude of one such gatekeeper. She felt that she was not taken seriously and claimed the gatekeeper insinuated that her extended employment break meant she no longer had industry appropriate skills. When she asked for information regarding rejoining midwifery, the

male representative she spoke to remarked that midwifery practices had changed immensely since her time and suggested that she would not be able to catch up with current practice at her age. She claimed that he was also reluctant to provide her with information and suggestions on what to do in order to get retrained. Her attempts to respond to advertisements in other areas met with similar disregard for her qualifications and skills.

These 'gatekeepers' were generally young and perhaps did not have the maturity or experience to deal with the needs of returners. Older mothers, especially, found the attitudes of the gatekeepers condescending at best and totally rude at worst. They explained that they felt humiliated at being treated as individuals without any paid work history. Many mothers recounted being told they were either too old or had left the workforce for too long. One participant said:

I was basically told that because I had stayed home for so many years, I probably couldn't make very good use of my brain [although she was applying for a job as a tea lady]...and I'd done a lot of secretary and treasurer work voluntarily.

Participants reported feeling caught between having to be polite since the employer or contact person had the power to influence their employment outcome, and feeling extreme irritation and resentment. As one participant explained, it really annoyed her that one of these gatekeepers whom she referred to as "a mere slip of a girl" had more power over her. She recounted an incident that she felt was a typical response to her job search attempts:

I went down to the shop and there was a girl who must have been all of 18 behind the counter and by this stage I had children who were older than her. And I said to her I was interested in the job. And she said, 'where's your CV?' I said I've done an awful lot of things. I don't have a CV... and she said, 'Can you sew? Can you put a zip in?' And I said, 'Look my dear, I've probably put in more zippers than you've had hot dinners.' ...And I wasn't even looked at.

In the end, perhaps adding insult to injury, she was to see the same job re-advertised several times over a period of several months. This was not an uncommon experience especially for participants in rural areas. These participants suggested employers often preferred younger candidates such as secondary school students. As one mother explained:

The manager told me, “They want somebody young. I have to employ somebody out of school.” He said, “I’m sick of employing young people who won’t stay on.” He wasn’t there long either.

Such negative attitudes increased the pressure on mothers to accept the jobs on offer, which were mainly low status and low paid. In some ways, the mothers’ accounts appeared to suggest that employers were quite free to discriminate against older returners, despite the Human Rights Act (1993) making discrimination based on age illegal.

In addition, many workplace requirements appeared to work against returners in an indirect way. The requirement for job applications to be accompanied by curriculum vita and third party references (usually from a current or recent employer), for instance, made it difficult for mothers to support their job applications in the same way that individuals who are in continuous employment can.

The need for a curriculum vitae

Returners found it very difficult to explain the gaps in their employment history. For instance, when asked about her work history, one mother said, “When it comes to previous employer, I can’t put anything in there as I haven’t been in work in that context.” For most participants, job application criteria had changed vastly since they last applied for a job. As one mother (who had previously worked as a town planner) explained:

When I was in the workforce, I walked out of university and into a job. I did have an interview but it was a kind of, ‘oh yes, hello. How are you? Welcome to the team.’ You just didn’t do interviews. And the thought of having to get the CV together and the interview was horrendous. I was so nervous.

Another mother with ten years' previous experience in teaching had to get assistance on how to write a CV from a friend (a recent returner) who pointed her to an internet-site that had suggestions on how to create a curriculum vitae. She felt she had to continuously apologise (to the interviewer) for having been out of paid work for eight years in order to take care of her children, although she had continued to do unpaid accounting and other such work for her church. She also had teaching experience at a large international school in an overseas location before having children. In the end she settled for a clerical position and felt she was quite lucky to have been offered the job, explaining that there was strong competition for the job from other mothers with dependent children.

Many participants said they tended not to look for jobs where curricula vitae were needed. Further, very few participants had thought of including their unpaid work with voluntary organisations in their CVs, though a few claimed they did. When in paid work, however, colleagues and supervisors would often advise returners to include all new work-related experiences in their CVs. In particular, they noted that their partners invariably included all activities, including community-based ones such as speaking to a community group, or participating in a radio interview, in their CVs.

By contrast, a mother (previously a school principal) recounted that she considered mentioning her home management skills at a job interview. She compared the multi-task aspect of mothering as being able to cook and carry out conversation with (three) little people to the casual lecturing hours that she had been offered, and suggested that some aspects of motherhood tasks were quite similar to those of a lecturer. She suggested that being able to multi-task, as in responding to interruptions when dealing with children, was similar to dealing with disruptive students. Nevertheless, she was reluctant to mention the skills she had gained informally, which she could easily identify, because she felt it would be seen as frivolous in a formal interview situation.

Participants also recounted difficulties with the lack of breastfeeding facilities in the workplace. This often results in delayed re-entry, as well as the increased tendency of young mothers to participate in very short hours of paid work. In liberal nations such as New Zealand and the USA, breastfeeding is seen as a woman's issue, though research suggests that enabling mothers to breastfeed at work benefits not just the

mothers and babies but also the employers (Department of Labour, 2005; Galtry, 1997 and 2000; Galtry & Callister, 1995). In New Zealand, while the Ministry of Health acknowledges the health benefits of breastfeeding for children (reduced incidence of obesity, for instance), there is no legislation to protect mothers' rights to breastfeed and few workplaces have facilities to enable mothers in paid work to continue to breastfeed, making this not just a health issue but also a gender equity issue (Galtry, 2000). The participants in this study were most frustrated by employers' attitudes towards breastfeeding mothers.

Availability of breastfeeding facilities

Some of the mothers reported returning to short hours of work when their children were still being breastfed and said this was a difficult issue to resolve. Mothers suggested the lack of breastfeeding facilities and support for young mothers at the workplace conveyed a message that mothers were less valued at work. They suggested that employers and state representatives took mothers for granted. As the following mother commented:

Look at the performance about breastfeeding in public. That was an issue ten years ago and is an issue now. We're taken for granted that we could do this [breastfeeding at work] but we're not given support to do it.

While some mothers (especially those with self-employed partners) who returned soon after childbirth were able to organise for someone, usually the husband, to bring the baby to the workplace for breastfeeding, others found the workplace hostile to such needs. In many cases, mothers who wanted to continue breastfeeding when in paid work would often give up well-paid jobs in favour of ones that paid less but had some flexibility for breastfeeding. In these cases, the mothers would consider flexible employment to be a better option. In reality, though, these mothers appear to 'jump through many hoops' in order to accommodate paid work and their breastfeeding needs. As one mother suggested:

My workplace wasn't supportive of my breastfeeding. As a result I decided that job wasn't user-friendly to me so I left. Then I found this job [teaching]

and it's easier to breastfeed when I work part-time, three weeks on and three weeks off.

When paid work and family responsibilities conflicted, the mothers in this study, more than the fathers, made the necessary adjustments. Such accommodations typically involved taking jobs at the back of the queue, since such jobs offered the most flexibility. The mothers who had returned to paid work at the time of the interview reported doing so in several stages: most had more than one episode of returning to part-time, short-term or casual jobs in between children, before staying in paid work longer and more continuously. It would appear that mothers, fathers, employers and wider society all agree that it is a mother's 'job' to take care of children and family. However, support for mothers to do this without it derailing their careers was not explicit nor adequate at the time that these mothers were returning to paid work (late 1990s-early 2000s).

Support for returners

Recently, the Working for Families package has increased financial assistance towards the costs of children, for most low-to-medium income families. The package includes a 20-hour free childcare at a teacher-led early childhood centre though the adequacy of both financial as well as physical provision of childcare facilities is questionable.

Further, paid parental leave has been increased from 12 to 14 weeks and extended to include the self-employed. In addition, the New Zealand job market is more buoyant. These changes will increase the employment opportunities of current and future returners. However, without change in the social order and power relations, the way paid and unpaid work is carried out remains intact and mothers appear to be still the least preferred occupational group and therefore likely to occupy positions at the back of the queue.

Availability of childcare

For most mothers of young children, full-time employment would only be possible if they could delegate responsibility for childcare to a third person. In most cases this would entail paying for childcare. The mothers in this study were mainly women with

qualifications and job experience, who might have been expected to be able to access jobs and work-related care. However, the low provision of childcare at the time that they were returning made childcare a significant barrier to their ability to obtain good jobs that required long hours. Since the implementation of the Working for Families package, however, childcare facilities and provision are set to increase and this may ease mothers' transition from the home to the workplace.

All participants suggested employers were reluctant to accommodate mothers' childcare needs, believing that employers expected mothers to make accommodations in the home when paid work and childcare conflicted. They believed that on the whole, employers did not view childcare as a workplace issue. It was left to mothers to ensure that they were free to work the hours that they were offered and had accepted. As a participants explained, "If they [returners] want a job, they have to take the jobs, the hours, make sacrifices and adjust their lives".

Even female employers appeared to expect mothers to be able to perform as childfree individuals when in the paid workforce. As the following mother explained:

My team leader and her husband chose not to have children so she actually doesn't like employing women with children because she felt that they had to take time off when their children are sick. She gets really annoyed when women get pregnant and take maternity leave.

However, for many mothers low pay made childcare less affordable; participants' mainly accepted jobs at the back of the queue since such jobs could be more easily combined with childcare. As the following mother (an international consultant before career break) explained:

There were opportunities where I could have got into my field of work but I couldn't do the work because of the childcare and housework. So I couldn't even get into short-term work...I had a pretty good career at 37-38 years old and I had made a mistake. At that age it [returning to paid work] was a very hard thing to do...I found at mid forties I had really lost my career.

Most participants reported having to rely on family members (in particular partners) and friends for childcare. Sole mothers, however, generally had no backup childcare and were least able to pay for childcare even when it was subsidised. Further, even mothers who claimed to have very supportive husbands found this a particular strain. The following mother explains:

It is a terrible strain [for the mother] to find the childcare, pay for the childcare and make sure your children get there and then pick them up afterward. I think it's a terrible burden. I don't think anybody really helps to make it any easier. You know for a lot of employers, it's your problem.

The sheer amount of energy needed to organise childcare in order to do a few hours of work each day put many mothers in this sample off re-entry until their children were older. It also made them more willing to accept casual hours of employment that fitted in with the hours when the children were at school. Further, even when childcare was available, the hours when childcare facilities and schools were open were not compatible with mothers' paid work hours. Participants also claimed the centres they preferred had long waiting lists.

Participants in rural areas faced an additional constraint in terms of mobility when the jobs they could have were located in the cities. This not only increased the cost of returning (transport and childcare), it also made the planning more complex. As one mother said:

For a couple hours of paid work you could be looking at more hours just making sure that things run smoothly while you are away. There are childcare to arrange, lunches to cut, pick up times and so on. You wonder if it's worth upsetting everyone for a couple hours of [paid] work.

Mothers needed to know that they had reliable backup when in paid work and often went to great lengths to ensure that the home still run smoothly. They suggested that good reliable childcare significantly increased a mother's ability to focus on paid work. Fathers with stay-at-home wives generally have such needs taken care of by their partners, and are able to commit long hours to paid work. Mothers in paid work,

however, continue to be responsible for most of the family work. This complicates mothers' returning experience. As one mother suggested:

I don't think I could work if I spent all my time thinking about my children... And yet when I'm at work, I try to put my family aside. I know they're at school. I know my husband is at work. And I'll try and focus a hundred percent on my job there.

Further, since most childcare centres and workplaces would not accept sick children, returners reported feeling worried about how their children's sickness would affect their hours of paid work. Some participants reported having elaborate contingency plans that included identifying two or three people on stand-by who could be ready and prepared to take on a sick child while they were at work. Most of the participants claimed having healthy children was a significant factor that enabled them to stay in paid work. They confessed that they did not know how they would have coped if their children had not been healthy and they had long hours of paid work.

For most mothers, the thought of having to leave sick children unattended or to have to take extended leave for sick children was unthinkable (participants invariably grimaced when they referred to such issues). Taking leave for sick children would mean losing out on pay and risking being seen as unreliable. Mothers, however, would often use their own sick leave (if they had any) and then not take any leave even when they themselves were sick. This is potentially a health hazard to the mothers, and for their workmates if their sickness is infectious. While childcare is now more plentiful (though still far from adequate) the issue of sick children is still very stressful for mothers. One mother found she had to rely substantially on her husband, who was self-employed, but suggested that his work demands meant that this could only be on emergency basis.

When [child] was sick my husband could look after [child]. I felt I had to be on call for my employer since I was in charge of the nursing staff. But he [husband] has his own business so it was difficult to juggle family and work.

Nevertheless, although partnered mothers could rely on their partners for some assistance, they generally did not do so because they considered their partners' jobs as more important. Participants suggested that having to use their statutory or sick leave entitlements in order to be able to stay home and care for sick children were a further disadvantage to mothers, compared with employees who did not have children. As one participant said:

I get five days sick leave. I might use that five days to look after my sick children but other employees would have it for themselves.

Some participants with older children suggested that mothers could be reluctant to take sick leave when they were sick because they were 'too conscientious'. As the following participant explained:

I could phone in sick if I wanted to and get a reliever. In fact I have work prepared in case I needed one at some stage but then a part of me thinks 'I'm just in the middle of this unit and I just want to do the next unit. I feel a sense of accomplishment when I do that... Women are too conscientious.

However, most participants felt that it was not so much that women were too conscientious but that they feared taking sick leave would affect how their employers saw them. They felt that employers might consider them unreliable and uncommitted to their job (thus affecting career opportunities). As one participant said:

It would be nice to take time off for sick children but I think we are all a bit worried about how we'd be perceived. It would be nice to do that if there wouldn't be black marks against us.

In addition, in New Zealand children under 14 years have to be supervised by an adult, and mothers who worked long part-time hours found this created additional stress for them. Some participants claimed they sometimes left younger children unsupervised or supervised by older siblings. Such strategies, though taken with reluctance, enabled the participants to have longer part-time hours, but at a cost in terms of the guilt that mothers expressed even years after the event. This is not,

however, a situation common only among New Zealand returners. Findings from some overseas research also suggest that working parents often depend on older children to mind younger siblings while they are at work (Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2006, p. 70; Qu, 2003).

Access to training

Access to training was and continues to be a significant issue for returners. The more extended the career break, the more mothers felt they needed to retrain. In some cases this was correct. Participants with occupational qualifications such as midwifery, nursing and teaching, for instance, were often faced with on-going changes in their fields, while those with tertiary qualifications felt they needed retraining to show employers that they were motivated and to indicate they had current job-relevant skills. Even in entry-level clerical positions, returners felt retraining was an essential requirement because of the use of computers in most places.

However, the lack of employer assistance and a shortage of government subsidies meant that mothers were obliged to pay for their own training, even though doing so increased the costs of job search. In New Zealand, as in other liberal nations, women, especially part-timers, are less likely to be given on-the-job training and when they do, training is of shorter duration (Davidson & Bray, 1994, pp. 70-90; Jenkins, 2004, pp. 121-124; Rubery, 1994, pp 343-345; Rubery, 1998). While some of the mothers in this project were able to access state funded retraining (such as the short courses used to entice trained teachers in high demand subjects to return to teaching in the late 1990s) there is generally very little in the way of training courses for partnered returners. Further, while there is increased state support for apprenticeships targeted at young people (OECD, 2003), there does not appear to be much in the way of government-assisted training aimed at 'working families'.

For most mothers in this project, only basic and short training was given. Frequently this would only occur when employers saw it as technologically prudent to do so: as in providing mothers with the basic skills on how to operate workplace technology such as check-out scanning machines or call centre computer operations. In some workplaces such as schools and nursing homes, participants would often be given some on-the-job training to become familiar with new procedures or regulations. Such

basic training did not provide returners with skills that would enable them to access better jobs.

There was also little information on appropriate re-training courses available to the participants in this study. For most participants, the loss of contact with paid work typically meant a loss of work-related information and this contributed to the time it took to find out about relevant courses. As the following participant explained, getting the right information was often frustrating:

You had to be re-registered for teaching and having to find out the information about that was very hard, being isolated from the usual network.

Although participants generally claimed that retraining improved their employment opportunities, access to retraining and getting a job reflected a classic 'catch-22' situation. As the following mother explained:

I wasn't given the opportunity to do retraining...without retraining they wouldn't look at me for a job. But without being on a shortlist for a job, they wouldn't give me retraining.

In some workplaces such as schools, permanent part-time employees were frequently given pro-rata on-the-job training. However, a pro-rata system leads to differential access between full-time and part-time staff, so that participants in part-time positions often felt excluded or only inadequately trained. This had implications for their work performance. The following participant's part-time position meant that she did not qualify for full training, which she felt was essential for her job:

As a part-timer I get offered staff development on a pro rata basis...I work point seven of a full-time equivalent job so even though I teach the whole year, I will only get point seven of the training, as if I'm only doing point seven of the work.

Often such training appeared badly thought out. One participant explained that a pro-rata system applied to her training affected students' perceptions of her skills,

contributing to her effectiveness at running her class. While her teaching hours were part-time, her responsibilities toward the class she was teaching were full-time. She felt that she needed to have access to all the relevant training in her subject area, but she was not eligible, as a part-timer, to access full training hours. At the time that she returned, the school was moving to the new National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) system and it was vital that she was able to understand and utilise the system. She explained:

I started the year with only a vague idea of what NCEA means so I couldn't answer the students' questions because I didn't know. The teacher in charge of part-time staff did get me on the course and that was vital. But it was one day and everybody else had three days... basically most of the term I didn't really know where I was... And of course the kids knew that.

Participants who were employed to teach short hours also reported not being able to participate in staff development programmes, such as attending conferences. This can significantly reduce mothers' ability to network and gain access to decent jobs. In addition, these mothers were also constrained by the lack of financial support toward the costs of retraining and other job-search associated costs, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Summary and discussion

The paid work experiences of the mothers in this study suggest that mothers returning to paid work are a least preferred occupational group. Their accounts clearly identified some of the processes that lead to their marginal position at the back of the queue. Although returners often claimed they 'chose' to stay at home and return to part-time or casual hours of employment, such 'choices' are not made under ideal conditions. They are often made against a background of significant constraints.

The mothers in this study accepted their 'socially sanctioned obligation to care' (Folbre, 1994; Ungerson, 2006) and prioritised their partners' jobs over their own careers. In particular, employers' attitudes and practices, reinforced by low social provision for working mothers at the time that these mothers were returning to paid work, contribute to the relegation of these returners to jobs at the back of the queue.

Most participants were obliged to accept low status part-time casual or temporary jobs closer to the home. Such jobs reflect the gendered nature of flexible employment (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004).

Participants believed that employers were able to discriminate against them on the basis of age as well as qualifications and skills. They suggested that employers preferred younger employees. Further, employers' perceptions that returners lacked current paid work experiences and qualifications allowed them to offer low-level jobs to returners. Participants suggested that even after retraining, employers were likely to place them in entry positions, suggesting that in this study, as in other studies, employers looked for specific paid work experiences rather than general experiences when recruiting staff (Higgins & Dalziel, 2001, pp. 157-169; Rees & Garnsey, 2003, p. 574).

Employers' assumption that career breaks lead to loss of skills ignores the many skills that returners bring to the workplace: mothers may have the same skills and qualifications as other applicants, but those skills and qualifications may need updating (Rimmer & Rimmer, 1997). Research suggests the work conditions and skills of running a household such as time management, negotiation, prioritising and taking responsibility for the development of others are all skills linked to paid work, especially at management level (Beck and Steel, 1989, p.84). The wide range of unpaid work experiences contributing to the skills that returners possess suggests that the definition and perception of what constitutes skill is indeed socially constructed (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1990, p. 61; Arvey & Begalla, 1975; Gaskell, 1986, pp. 362-378; Horrell, Rubery & Burchell, 1990 and 1994; Mahony, 1995; Scott-Dixon, 2004, pp. 77-97; Oakley, 1974, 1985; Phillips & Taylor, 1987, pp. 79-84; Rees & Garnsey, 2003, pp.571-574). In practice, employers' failure to recognise returners' skills and competences allows discrimination against mothers to continue and contributes to returners' lack of career opportunities (Chapman, 1990, p. 99; Kmec, 2005, pp. 40-41; MacKlem, 2003, pp. 11-21; Rees & Garnsey, 2003, pp. 571-574).

Further, research suggests that employers are more likely to train younger employees than older ones. This ignores the positive benefits of investing in returners. It has been shown, for instance, that mothers are highly productive and investment in retraining,

along with appropriate policy support, contributes to mothers' ability to return to and maintain a career (Rimmer & Rimmer, 1997; Trappe, 1996, p. 368). By contrast, there does not appear to be any research that suggests that it takes longer or is more costly to train mothers (Trappe, 1996, p. 369).

Research suggests that training increases the chances for low status workers to achieve upward occupational mobility (Lambert, 1999, p. 187). In the study for this thesis, the upwardly mobile career trajectory of three of the participants who were able to access government funded training is a clear indication that state assistance is a significant factor mediating mothers' access to good jobs. These mothers were able to make use of the state funded Training Incentive Allowance that allowed them access to childcare and assistance towards course fees, books and accommodation. However, such training schemes are currently available only to individuals on a benefit system. If extended (with increased provision) to partnered returners, these schemes would increase the number of mothers in decent jobs higher up the queue, where mothers would have better occupational status and pay.

Other barriers facing returners could be seen in existing workplace cultures, including long hours commitment and recruitment practices. Access to jobs at the head of the queue, for instance, requires continuity of employment as well as commitment to long hours. Several returners suggested they had to turn down senior positions because of the increased hours required for such positions.

Other participants suggested they were disadvantaged by employers' use of formal interviews, curricula vitae and third party references (from former or current employers or work colleagues) in recruitment and selection of employees. Mothers' lack of experience with formal interviews and large gaps in employment history made it difficult for them to convince employers of their suitability for career type jobs. These mothers felt intimidated because of the gap in their curriculum vitae for the years they had spent caring for children. They knew that as far as employers were concerned, this 'counted for nothing', unlike the years that ex-servicemen spent in warfare (Ang & Briar, 2002; Tizard, 1986; Waring, 1988).

Nevertheless, in the current climate of labour market shortages, the New Zealand government like other governments in most industrialised nations, has increased social provision and support towards the cost of children. In New Zealand, the Working for Families package has increased financial provisions towards children. Further, the government has increased the length of paid parental leave (from 12 to 14 weeks) for working parents and extended it to include the self-employed. Such initiatives, together with a buoyant job market, are likely to increase the employment opportunities of current and future mothers returning to paid work.

This chapter has reported on mothers' perceptions of how employers' assumptions, beliefs and workplace practices affected their re-entry jobs. It has also discussed how these mothers' disadvantaged position in the labour market has been reinforced by a traditionally low level of social provision towards the costs of children, which contributed to the relegation of the returners in this study to low status employment at the back of the queue. The Working for Families package and a buoyant job market may increase the employment opportunities of current and future mothers. This may help to reduce the incidence of returners' occupational downgrading. However, without changes in the workplace, employers are likely to still place mothers in jobs at the back of the queue. This issue is further explored in Section Three. In the following chapter the conditions of work in such positions are explored.

CHAPTER EIGHT: BEING AT THE BACK OF THE QUEUE

Introduction

The returners in this study associated being a stay-at-home-mum with being a non-entity, and looked forward to returning as going toward the light at the end of the tunnel. The lack of a work-related identity while performing unpaid work, and having no economic independence, underpinned the experience of a career break. The promise of having one's own money when returning to paid work gave them a sense of hope. However, their experiences of re-entry into paid work fell far short of their expectations.

This chapter explores returners' employment conditions. It highlights the generally poorer conditions of part-time, casual and temporary employment at the back of the queue. The first half of the chapter focuses on returners' employment conditions, highlighting the impacts of structural barriers that prevent the full integration of returners into the paid workforce.

The second half of the chapter explores the way paid and unpaid work is valued. I argue that under-valuation of care work and returners' lowly labour market conditions contribute to returners' weak bargaining position in negotiating for better employment terms and conditions.

Conditions of flexible (non-standard/precarious) employment

Some types of flexible employment, such as permanent part-time employment, offer better security than other work of less permanent and more casual nature. In this section I look at the terms and conditions of returners in this study in both permanent part-time and temporary or casual work contracts.

Permanent part-time job conditions

As indicated in Chapter six, of the participants interviewed individually and in focus group meetings, only three mothers had full-time employment (although they, too, had short-term or casual work while on a benefit and looking after dependent children). Of the remaining participants, five were permanent part-time employees while another six held short-term, part-time jobs while four mothers had casual hours

of employment; four mothers held more than one job and another four were involved in unpaid, community (voluntary) work.

The participants who were in permanent part-time employment, felt more secure in term of continuity of employment. However, these mothers were not working the hours that they would have preferred. As indicated in the previous two chapters, returners in part-time positions found it difficult to transition from part-time to full-time jobs or jobs with longer paid work hours. While childcare responsibilities had a large impact on mothers with dependent children, for older mothers, employers' perceptions that all mothers were similarly constrained, suggested that these mothers' employment opportunities were negatively affected by not just labour market conditions but also organisational practices.

In general, mothers' felt obligation toward the care of children constrained and weakened their labour market position. As indicated in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, employers were able to offer mothers flexible work hours or schedules in return for lower pay. Participants suggested that employers generally believed mothers' time away from paid work meant that they had less marketable skills and to an extent, the mothers in this study succumbed to similar beliefs. However, for all these returners, flexibility was not liberating. Employers appeared able to dictate the number of hours and schedules, depending on their specific organisational needs for labour. Returners in part-time positions did not feel valued. On the contrary, they frequently reported being vulnerable to employers' exploitation.

Returners' vulnerability to exploitation

Participants with dependent children often valued part-time work. However, they preferred flexibility with good pay and good work conditions. In most cases, however, mothers found that by accepting flexible work, they had to forfeit pay and certain fringe benefits. Participants also claimed they worked longer hours than they were paid for. One mother explained:

You can be abused in part-time work. I wrote down the hours I worked but I get no sick leave or annual leave.

Another participant said:

You get exploited working part-time. I mean I work longer here than the people who work nine-to-five and get a salary. I work nine-to-five every day and get half pay.

The mothers described how they took pride in doing a job well, and would often pay for further training to become more up-to-date with work place technology. These efforts were often invisible, and neither employers nor co-workers were aware of the amount of good will and effort that participants appeared to expend in fulfilling their paid work contracts. Participants also felt that employers as well as (full-time) co-workers tended to forget that part-time staff did not have the same paid work conditions as they. For instance, part-time staff in teaching, as in other occupations generally, were not paid for non-contact hours, even when they were on-site in between teaching classes. However, participants suggested that they were expected to complete the tasks regardless of whether completion would incur more hours of unpaid work. Employers appeared to expect some work to be done out of contract hours. Sometimes this involved taking students on field trips, making contacts with other workplaces, arranging transport and so on, often done outside of contract hours.

Returners in teaching, for instance, suggested that lesson preparation time was often not factored into the pay, and when it was, often the pay was inadequate for the time needed to complete the lesson preparation and marking. Many participants reported taking work home and putting in long hours to prepare for short hour classes. In addition, in teaching, students would not necessarily distinguish between part-time and full-time staff, and part-time staff sometimes had to deal with students' needs out of contract hours. Participants in secondary schools, for instance, would often participate in extra-curricular activities such as sports day. In some schools, participants would receive some pay or day in lieu, while in others such participation was seen as a show of goodwill on the part of the participant.

In other cases, both employers and co-workers appeared to believe that if a part-timer was not on site, then they were not putting in the same commitment to the workplace. A mother who shared a crowded office said:

I'm only point one seventh of full-time equivalent and I'm in 6 hours a week, but for the non-contact hours I do my work at home. When I'm not there people sometimes makes comments. But you're working your butt off at home. I spent hundreds of dollars on books just for this course.

Some participants suggested they often paid for small items to do with their work as a gesture of good will. A participant who had sole charge of a class, for instance, said she would often pay for fuel (and sometimes, refreshments for students). This show of good will was often taken for granted and not reciprocated. One mother explained:

I buy a few things for the students and fill the van up on field trips and I've never been reimbursed... And I wish I had now. Otherwise if you don't tell people what you've done then they don't know and they feel they can walk all over you.

As most workplaces had procedures for reimbursement, it could be argued that mothers who did not make use of such systems were not acting wisely. However, for many returners, goodwill and reciprocity were a part of how relationships outside of paid work were configured. Nevertheless, when in paid work, participants had to learn quickly that paid work routines were often more impersonal and less reciprocal.

Further, participants who had held various high status jobs before taking employment breaks often found that their employers and colleagues were not aware of or interested to know about their past employment history. In many cases employers and some full-time colleagues appeared to assume that mothers returning to paid work all shared the same history of not having paid work skills/qualifications and were therefore only there to assist and support. By accepting low-level jobs, these participants had confined themselves to low-level tasks. Often these jobs did not require them to make decisions or carry responsibility beyond the completion of set activities. The participants in this situation reported feeling humiliated and resentful. Very often it was the lack of available jobs that kept these participants in the jobs despite negative emotions that such jobs created in them. A mother who had had a job as an international consultant for many years before motherhood explained the experience of being placed the back of the job queue:

It was the humiliation of working with people who didn't know that I was capable of more and had done far greater things ... I did a lot of menial work and I had a background or history that they didn't know about ... I felt my employers didn't realise how humiliated I felt doing a lot of scrubbing, repetitive work that a two year old could have done, cleaning after someone else.

In addition, participants found that staff communication was often lacking or very poor. In particular, work place meetings, especially when they occurred outside of part-timers' paid work hours, excluded part-timers from the information loop and network that could potentially be vital for job success or to gain information about employment opportunities.

Returners and work-place communication

Participants suggested that being left out of the communication loop could result in unintentional work-place blunders such as failure to include new procedures or guidelines when carrying out a task. It could also signal a lack of commitment to employers and co-workers. In some secondary schools, staff meetings are often held after school hours and sometimes extend to the early evening. In particular, parent-teacher interviews are often held in the evening and part-time staff members who have responsibility for a whole class or subject area are often required to attend such meetings, but are not necessarily compensated for the hours of attendance.

One participant, for instance, found staff meetings posed significant problems for her and she feared that her failure to attend meetings could be construed as a lack of commitment to her paid work. However, she also felt that by arranging to hold staff meetings outside of her paid work hours, her employer had failed to consider her need to arrange for childcare to cover those hours. Apart from the extra expense, this caused additional stress in terms of her having to re-arrange her family schedules and changing the dynamics of her home environment. Such inefficiency undermined the benefit of flexible hours. She said:

The HOD has a habit of saying, 'we have a meeting tonight'. And it's like if you'd told me this yesterday, I could have organised somebody to look after

the kids but sorry I'm not going to be able to come. I can't organise something for the kids.

However, she also felt disadvantaged by not participating in meetings, as important decisions were made during such meetings. In most cases, employers did not appear to consider it important for their part-time staff to be updated on such decisions. This had implications for individuals' performance. Without access to workplace information, part-timers can unwittingly be seen as under-performing or under-committed. Such perceptions have ramifications for their employment opportunities. One participant explained how such practices affected her:

What was discussed at meetings was not necessarily passed on to me. It was simply assumed that someone had already told me. And people would expect me to carry out certain activities or adhere to certain rules that I wouldn't have heard of.

Nevertheless, despite such drawbacks, participants in permanent part-time positions fared better than participants in more precarious temporary and casual work. Participants in the latter category reported a more precarious employment condition.

Returners in precarious employment

More than half of the participants (14 mothers) reported that they had temporary employment and casual hours of work. In many cases, short-term or casual contracts with the same employer would continue over several years. It was often difficult to progress from temporary to more permanent positions unless one was in full-time employment. The following mother explained:

When I was asking for something more permanent it just wasn't going to be available for me. It was made clear to me that if I wanted to apply for a full-time job there were positions available.

This participant felt that working part-time affected her career opportunities. Despite holding highly demanded qualifications (specialist medical technician), she felt she was not going to be valued unless she was working full-time. She continued:

Nobody was going to actually help me have that career or have that type of job and have my children at the same time. It's really frustrating. You know I'm good enough for them to ring all the time and ask me to do things but I'm not good enough unless I work full-time.

Despite the Employment Relations Act (2000), which stipulated that contracts could not be rolled over from year to year if the work is ongoing, many employers break the law unless there is a strong on-site union to challenge this behaviour. In many workplaces, while each contract would be terminated at the end of the contract period, there was an unspoken agreement that should the employer need more staff, the participant (s) would be recalled. In effect, such positions resembled glorified on-call jobs. Even in professions such as health and secondary education with renowned shortages, mothers were offered employment on a casual or non-permanent basis only. As one mother explained:

And the frustration with all of these jobs (because some of them I went back to and they were just small contracts to do specific tasks) was that none of them was permanent job or with permanent hours. They would contact me saying, "we're desperate," ...and they didn't know how long it was going to be for so they just kept using me and using me until they didn't require me any longer...it continued to be temporary and I never signed any contract.

The insecurity of such positions makes it even harder to plan for the future. Working from one contract period to another at employers' discretion was not only stressful, but also affected participants' ability to plan their paid work and childcare tasks. In addition, such employment did not provide mothers with fringe benefits such as sick leave, annual leave, redundancy pay or on-the-job training. There was also no protection against unfair employer practices.

Employers, however, appeared to believe that staff working very short hours had chosen these hours, even when the staff member had made it clear that this was not the case. Many participants described the lack of transparency in employers' recruitment and promotional practices. In some workplaces, participants suggested that new employees would be appointed without notification of a vacant position,

despite the law requiring all job vacancies to be advertised. In this case, part-time employees looking to move to full-time employment reported being overlooked. A participant caught in this situation resigned after a few years of being used to fill in various short-term positions. She explained:

I got very annoyed at the lack of transparency in that I didn't know that the job was coming up and suddenly these young men would appear on the staff... Yet when I asked for full-time work they said they had to advertise all jobs. But new people are appointed all the time and there's not been the jobs advertised. And people are promoted and given new titles without job advertisements as well.

Another participant explained the difficulty of being taken seriously as a casual employee and suggested employers had a rather cavalier attitude in hiring casual staff. She explained:

I had a few part-time jobs before getting this full time position. In one of them I applied for more hours doing relieving... One day I looked into the room next to me and there was this other woman... She said, 'I'm actually taking some of the slower readers,' and I said I thought I was doing that... but the [employer] had given her the hours and I was so hurt and offended... And I just think that was really stinky... People just aren't valued... I mean we're people aren't we?

Even in cases where there were obvious needs for their skills, participants explained that it was very difficult to become full-time. Some participants spent years applying for full-time positions unsuccessfully. A mother noted:

It's very difficult to become permanent [even when student numbers kept increasing in the school where she taught] ... It leaves the worker vulnerable to what will happen next. Do I prepare for the next year? How much do I allow myself to be involved in the other school activities in view of the lack of certainty?

Some participants suggested that their employers disregarded their needs and efforts and they described how they felt ‘trampled’ on. Returners in short-term relieving positions, for instance, reported feeling powerless to protest against unfair amounts of work. These mothers frequently reported that they wanted to show goodwill towards their employers and valued good work-place relationships. They appeared to be very accommodating but felt let down by being taken for granted by employers or work colleagues. One mother recounted her experience as part of a group of mothers in relief teaching:

We were told we would be relieving and work would be provided and we just had to teach. It turned out that we prepared the work, marked the tests and wrote reports for all the children. And then we attended parent-teachers evenings... And we were being paid as relievers even though we were doing full-time jobs with the extra classes...we sort of got the feeling of ‘you’re available. Why don’t you do it? What’s the problem with doing it?’

In such cases, while the extra hours were paid for, often the inability to plan ahead caused complications at home as well as at work. In these instances, too, participants felt they had no choice, since refusing to accept casual offers or complaining about work conditions could be viewed negatively by employers. Returners felt that if they complained too much, their employers would see them as disgruntled and difficult and this could lead to their not getting further job offers.

Nevertheless, participants with more than one dependent child suggested that having to accommodate irregular workplace demands disrupted their households. They sometimes questioned the value of disrupting their family life for low pay and irregular hours of work. Participants whose husbands/partners had jobs with regular hours and good pay suggested they sometimes turned down such offers and waited for better opportunities. However, those who were main breadwinners or sole mothers did not have this choice, as indicated in Chapter Five.

Working irregular hours has other disadvantages that caused further stress to participants. Employees on temporary/casual contracts were often paid hourly wages and had to fill in time sheets to claim their pay. Some participants reported they lost

pay when they forgot to fill in time sheets. If no time sheets were completed, there would be no pay and missing the deadline would often mean financial strife for low-income earners, as payment would be delayed. In addition, forgetting to get a time sheet in on time created unnecessary pressures and could disrupt workplace relationships. Some mothers claimed that they often incurred the displeasure of co-workers in the pay unit and this made them feel more distressed. These participants also had to ensure that they were paid the correct amount. This caused increased stress for participants who were often already stressed from having to stretch their day to accommodate irregular paid work hours. A participant doing relief teaching said she had to keep a watchful eye on her pay, contributing to her stress level generally:

The accounts administrators kept messing it up – unlike for salaried staff, they have to do our pay every week and they keep mucking it up. I have to watch that the pay is right. It’s just another stress.

The situation was arguably even worse for participants holding more than one job, especially when they worked for more than one employer and at different sites. Participants suggested it was easy to forget to fill in timesheets on time, and to remember the different hours worked, especially when there were young children to organise and care for as well. In such cases it was not inconceivable that the workplace would “spill” into the home and vice versa, complicating lives lived on the edge of insecurity.

Disadvantages of holding multiple jobs

Many participants suggested that they needed to boost their incomes by holding more than one job. They explained that holding multiple jobs would provide them with a safety net against unemployment. They also hoped that working with different employers could potentially expand their work-related networks, perhaps leading to more employment opportunities. For instance, some participants reported that if one did more than one job, then there could be a chance that at least one of the jobs could become permanent or lead to increased hours. However, employers appeared to view mothers holding multiple jobs negatively. While employers might appreciate returners’ flexibility and ability to hold multiple jobs, they were less likely to appoint

them to full-time or permanent positions, preferring instead to appoint someone with a 'stable' work history.

There was a very strong feeling of insecurity and of not belonging amongst participants who held multiple jobs, especially when these jobs were located in different work sites. Depending on the jobs, these mothers could also be required to perform different tasks at different sites. The mothers claimed they were often under pressure to rush from one location to another and to be punctual as well as to perform up to at least the same standard as other employees. These mothers claimed they tried to fit into the normal day and schedules of the workplaces but suggested they often felt excluded from the normal activities in the workplaces. One returner noted:

Sometimes I think you're floating from place to place. I don't have time to fit it all in. I don't get to have morning tea with the other teachers and I really do very much feel on the outer. I'm not chatting with the other ladies and the odd time I do go they don't even talk to me.

In addition, these returners also claimed they felt constantly stressed. They suggested that they put in a hundred percent of effort at each workplace, and often succumbed to employers' expectations of time and place commitment. Over a long period of time though, this could lead to participants feeling distressed and resentful. One multiple jobs holder explained:

I find it hard switching hats because I've had two part-time jobs. In one I have students who are very pushy and who're after every cent they paid and you do have watch your every step with them. And it's really exhausting having to change jobs.

Employers' relegation of mothers to the back of the queue undervalues mothers' skills and qualifications. It also excludes mothers from full participation in paid work and in the day-to-day activities of an organisation, and makes it difficult for part-timers to be fully integrated into the paid workforce. Moreover, paying mothers less as a trade-off for flexible employment perpetuates mothers' economic dependence and the perception of mothers as a secondary labour force. This contributes to mothers' sense

of low self-confidence and weakens their bargaining position both at home and in the paid workplace. The effect of low self-confidence and weak bargaining position appears to work in a vicious cycle, each feeding into the other.

Mothers' low self-confidence

Personal confidence made a significant difference in how mothers conducted themselves at job interviews and contributed to how employers viewed them in terms of promotions. Returners in this study, as in other studies (Crittenden, 2001, p. 236; Langkau & Langkau-Hermann, 1980; Mason, 1998 and 2000; Padula, 1994; Rothwell, 1980, p. 202; Yohalem, 1980), indicated a low sense of confidence that they felt affected their employment outcomes. However, while the participants in this study suggested a link between full-time motherhood and low self-esteem or confidence, in retrospect, they could also see this as directly linked to the higher value placed on paid work over motherhood-related tasks and care work in general. As one mother explained, if one had a paid job, one grew "ten feet high". Some participants, for instance, felt pressured to return to paid work, suggesting that there was a societal pressure to make mothers feel valued only when they were in the labour market. One mother said:

Mothers are made to feel guilty for staying at home. I was often asked why I wasn't at work when I had all these qualifications. It was like, 'How dare you just stay home and look after [son's name] when we've [taxpayers] spent so much on educating you?'

Participants also appeared to link self-esteem with having a paid job. These mothers claimed a loss of confidence when they became stay-at-home mothers, and appeared to have internalised the belief that mothers staying at home did not do valuable work. As one highly qualified mother explained:

I think a lot of esteem comes to women from paid work. I didn't realise that till I came back into the workforce. I feel productive. But I was doing very productive work as a mother but it's not recognised.

Another participant (also highly skilled and qualified) explained that she had to “restructure” herself when in paid work because she had felt under-valued (except by her own family) for the unpaid work that she did. She explained:

When I started back I felt quite fragile but when I realised my qualification was higher [than her colleagues in general] it made me feel okay about it...you have to restructure who you are...mothers don't realise how demanding it is to be a mother and how much it affects your self-esteem.

Participants found that men as well as employed women held stay-at-home-mothers in low regard. The returners felt that, “there's very much this attitude in society that yes, mothers should stay at home and look after the children but we're not going to treat them as valuable beings”. The following comments illustrate mothers' feelings of being less than equal, compared with men and women without children:

Has anyone else had the experience of going to work functions [at partners/husbands' workplace] and being asked, ‘what do you do and when you say, ‘I stay home,’ conversation turns still and they look away into space and you get the idea they're thinking, ‘oh, how boring’ and of course we don't have anything interesting to say.

Another mother added:

Motherhood is very much undervalued. While I was at home I felt, ‘oh you're just at home’, you know. Whereas I've got a degree and am quite bright and have great potentials but you tend to be looked down on.

In addition, mothers' return to low status employment appeared to affect their sense of identity. The loss of status was sometimes linked with loss of power and authority and a work-related identity. The following participant, formerly a consultant, recounted the associated loss in responsibility and authority when returning to a clerical/administrative position:

The other job I had I was in strategic planning that involved opening and shutting various factories. It was to do with dairy factories, making decisions about whether to expand and where the best location for a factory was... I went back to a few part-time jobs doing basic photocopying and office tasks.

Another participant who held out for jobs that were commensurate with her skills and competence sadly found herself still unemployed at the time of the interview. She recounted her experience regarding one of the many jobs that she applied for:

They were offering only \$10 an hour. This was for somebody to look after the shop, handle the money, deal with the customers, deal with all the dry cleaning that came and went and they wanted the person to do alterations, an awful blooming job...and I said, 'What are you offering as an hourly rate?' she said \$10 and I said, 'You've got to be joking. With my life experiences no way I'd work for that'. And they simply weren't interested.

She felt that she had been a very successful mother and wife. Nevertheless, she felt let down [by society] and regarded her unemployment as a waste of her human capital. She said:

It leaves me thinking: I've got three wonderful kids. They are doing really well but what's now for me? ...I have the skills but nobody seems to want them.

The subtle and not so subtle messages that these participants appeared to receive regarding the lack of value attached to motherhood and other forms of care work made returners feel they were non-entities as stay-at-home mothers regardless of how successful they might have been in looking after the nation's young citizens and future taxpayers. Most participants appeared to have taken on board employers' perception that skills acquired in the course of community and other unpaid work were not as valuable as formally acquired qualifications and skills. Many participants who could afford to were willing to pay for retraining in the hope of accessing better-paid jobs.

The effects of low self-confidence appeared quite powerful, often negatively affecting participants' paid work opportunities. Employers' perception of a returners' poise and self-confidence affected their employment decisions, and many returners suggested that they did not feel confident about negotiating better pay and work conditions because they lacked confidence to do so. Further, when in paid work, mothers' relative lack of visibility (not being on site, being excluded from normal paid work activities and lacking confidence) could mean that they were not seen as worthy of being promoted to full-time or permanent positions. Some participants suggested that not having confidence made them more likely to accept lower pay in low status jobs. As one mother commented:

When I returned to work I had lost my confidence and I was much more grateful to accept a low wage because of that.

Some mothers chose not to apply for jobs that they knew they were capable of doing. One mother, with an impressive history of various professional jobs in between childbirths, and who managed her husband's professional practice, reported feeling diffident about applying for management jobs that she knew she had the skills to be competent in. She said:

In terms of my professional confidence I haven't got any further because why wouldn't I apply for a managerial position otherwise? I think I wouldn't get it... I think it comes back to the confidence thing that I thought I had but I don't.

Earlier in the interview she had said, "I think the team leader still held me in high regard in terms of what I could do. I already had the proven ability of experience." For most returners in this study, a lack of self-confidence and the low status jobs that they held on returning contributed to a weak bargaining position in the paid workforce.

Returners' weak bargaining position

As discussed in Chapter Two, the terms and conditions of part-time work are poorer than those of full-time work. Part-time work frequently incurs low pay, no career

prospects and no employment protection and fringe benefits. The participants in this study were vulnerable to employers' discrimination and exploitation. The lack of security in their job further undermined their bargaining power in the paid work force. Even highly skilled returners felt significantly powerless in contract negotiations. This made it difficult to negotiate for better terms and conditions. For instance a highly skilled participant who was in a good career before taking time out stated that having to negotiate contracts was very stressful because employers held more power. She said:

I just had to accept it [new contract]. There's quite a lot less money for doing 70 hours and I'm cheesed off with that. The boss seems to be quite immovable. I get the feeling that she had in mind for me to either take it or leave it. She'd be quite happy for me to leave it, I'm sure.

In addition, participants were constrained by employers' perception of their work commitment and willingness to fit in. Most participants said they were reluctant to demand better pay and work conditions for fear that they would be labelled 'difficult employees' and not be offered further jobs. Despite feeling dissatisfied, the returners in casual and short-term employment felt obliged to accept the conditions that employers set. In one workplace, a participant suggested that the fact that the workplace was comprised of mothers with relatively well-off partners made it even harder to make her dissatisfaction known. As the main breadwinner for her household, she felt that she could not afford to lose her jobs. She explained:

In my workplace the majority of the staff are middle-aged women who have partners and who treat their jobs as a second job. So they don't complain.

Employers, on the other hand, appeared to use mothers' vulnerability as a bargaining chip in their favour. As one participant suggested, "Employers know you're going to be so happy to have the kind of job you want because you need the flexibility and opportunity to re-enter [paid] work". Participants suggested that management could and would often dictate terms of employment and change them according to their own needs. They felt that employers left them little room for renegotiation. One participant noted:

The problem is at the moment we're renegotiating my contracts and they've given me half the non-contact hours for every contact hour...it's a joke to expect me to mark and prepare the lessons and sort out the practical tasks for them and everything else that you have to do with that non-contact hour ...it's take it or leave it and I suspect she would be very happy if I left it.

The short-term nature of temporary work means that at the end of each contract, the employer's obligations toward the employee ended with the termination of the contract. Sometimes when short-term contracts were carried forward into a new term the job description as well as the terms and conditions would change. In practice this allowed employers to offer (reconstructed) jobs to other employees, reinforcing the vulnerability of casual workers.

Competition for jobs that offered flexible hours among mothers of dependent children made the situation more complex. Participants with younger children were often obliged to accept flexible work at the expense of pay. One mother said, "There's a lot of competition for good teaching jobs and you know if you're married you can't just pack up and move to a new city."

In addition, participants were often tied to the locations of their partners' jobs. In most cases, the partners were in higher status (better paid) jobs and the families were dependent on the higher and more regular incomes from such positions. One highly skilled mother explained that she was told she could obtain a higher position if she were willing to move to another town, but chose to continue in her part-time position. She explained:

There's no area for promotion in my organisation and in this town. But I can't leave because of my family commitments...Women take a back seat to men. Often women leave their jobs for their husband's job but not the other way round.

Older participants, meanwhile, felt their age placed them in a relatively disadvantageous position when in competition with younger employees, especially if they were also male and similarly qualified. One participant felt particularly

disadvantaged in her workplace because she felt there was a definite preference for younger and male employees. She suggested that when she was younger, she had better bargaining power, as she was more mobile and could be more selective about the type of job she wanted. She explained:

And the young people who are coming through if they don't like the job they could go somewhere else. I did that at that age and you can chase good jobs. But at our age, we have dependents and other things to keep us here.

Participants suggested that in places where the work forces were comprised primarily of middle-aged women and where the employer wanted to better balance the gender and age ratios, older women returners were very much disadvantaged. By contrast, they argued that younger employees could demand better terms and conditions, and that younger male employees were more likely to use their better bargaining position to advantage. Mothers suggested that younger people had more power, and employers' preference for them placed them in a better bargaining position for jobs at the head of the queue. One mother gave the following account as an example of the more powerful position of young people:

One of the bright young men that we were talking about – you know God's gift to [specific subject] teaching. He told me, 'I've told her [employer] that I chose [subject] because it doesn't demand the same commitment as a primary school teacher', which he was... 'I'm not going to wreck my social life and my home for the sake of doing [subject].' I'm sure my jaw dropped.

The difficulties of moving to better part-time or permanent full-time positions also made participants more cautious in their negotiating approach. This made it harder for participants to protect themselves from exploitation. As one participant explained, fear of losing her job made her more compliant:

It's jolly hard to move your place of residence. Everyone is so busy and it's really hard to build up a new network and make new friendships. So we think if you don't rock the boat...I'd be mortified if I lost my job because I know

how hard it was to get full-time. And I want to speak up for myself but you know you have to put up with something less than satisfactory.

For some returners, a lack of up-to-date knowledge about workplace culture and practices reduced their ability to negotiate their employment contracts to their advantage. One participant said she was not aware that she had to renegotiate her terms and conditions. Having been in short-term employment, her main worry was to ensure that she would still have a job at the end of each job contract. She explained:

I know in my job all the people they recruit from overseas negotiate their contracts. I found out one of my colleagues from the U.K. makes about \$1000 a year more than I do ... I found that you had to negotiate and renegotiate your contract and it was very exhausting and stressful. The things that I thought was part of the job I found I had to have bargained for.

Participants also reported that employers could and would often renege on verbal offers of jobs. Some returners saw this as employers using the 'carrot and the stick' technique in order to control an itinerant workforce. Participants sometimes reported cases where employers and employees would come to verbal agreements about job conditions but would then fail to honour such verbal agreements. Without a written offer these participants had no concrete backup for their claims and so could not seek redress. Such actions added to the vulnerability of returners, and many continued to hold on to several part-time positions for longer than they wanted to. For sole wage earners relying on verbal promises was very risky, as the following participant found:

My boss doesn't put anything in writing. She told me that I would be paid in the semester break but come the break and she didn't pay me. She said, 'Oh no, I never said that.' And I nearly went under.

Clearly, the lack of workplace as well as public support for mothers in paid work increases the vulnerability of mothers returning to paid work. The mothers in this study appeared to make many compromises, often to their own disadvantage. Why would this be so? In the next section I address the questions posed in Chapter Four in regard to the persistent exploitation of mothers in low status jobs.

Who benefits from returners' position at the end of the queue?

It seems clear that mothers' compromised paid work positions are of benefit to some groups of individuals, including children, husbands, partners and employers. Children benefit from mothers' career breaks, especially in their early formative years. The mothers in this study took pride and comfort in having brought up their children successfully. The children appeared to have done very well educationally and in work and were reportedly socially well-adjusted and generally well-behaved citizens. As the future workforce, they would go on to benefit society through their contribution to paid work and in tax contributions.

The participants' husbands and partners also appeared to benefit. Participants' unpaid or part-time paid work freed their partners to pursue jobs at the head of the queue unhampered by childcare demands. In addition, the family benefited from the additional income that mothers brought in from their paid work. For partners who became redundant, having another income was a significant break that allowed them to retrain or search for another job (without having to worry about childcare, in most cases).

Employers were able to make use of mothers' vulnerability and need for flexibility. In many cases, employers appeared able to meet demand flexibility by offering jobs according to fluctuating demands, rather than as a projected plan for growth in their labour force. For instance, participants involved in teaching international students have found that their contracts changed according to the rise and ebb of student numbers. In this way, increased student numbers would see their hours of paid work increase but when student numbers fell, their contracts would not be renewed. Such strategies cut costs and allow employers to respond to their customers speedily and effectively. It also means that short-term market changes can be smoothed out without altering their full-time staff numbers.

In general, returners believed that employers "get very good value for their money", since mothers in part-time work often worked many hours for no pay, though they put in huge efforts. Further, mothers' willingness to pay for their own training allowed

employers to save costs. In addition, some employers were able to benefit further when these mothers were able to provide on-the-job training for their co-workers, often at no cost to employers. One participant, for instance, paid for her teacher training and later returned to her former occupation as a health scientist. She found that she had more to offer the employer:

It's given me more skills. Nobody in my organisation has teaching qualifications so now I train other people though I'm not paid extra. I am now setting up training for the organisation that may be used elsewhere...I don't get any money or recognition for it.

Instead of providing flexible employment to enable returners to combine paid work and childcare optimally, employers appeared able to use returners' labour as a way to save production costs and to provide a speedy response to labour market demands (Daune-Richard, 2000, pp. 7-11; Reimer, 2003, pp. 136-137; Usui & Colignon, 1996; Watts & Rich, 1992). In some cases, the participants' employment patterns were so intermittent (with contracts rolled over when there was demand for their labour and ceased when demand fell) as to reflect employers' use of their labour as a reserve. Further, mothers' unpaid caring services contribute to national savings by enabling governments to reduce public spending on care (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Daly & Rake, 2003; McPherson, 2000; Mahony, 1995; Millar, 1994; Millns, 1996; Sassoon, 1992, pp. 172-173; Simpson, 1991; Walby, 1990; Wharton, 2004).

The participants in this study, however, did not appear to have benefited from returning to substandard jobs at the back of the queue. For these mothers, taking career breaks had resulted in loss of careers and loss of earnings as well as increased vulnerability to poverty in old age. As one mother asked, "What's left for me?"

Summary and discussion

This chapter completes the report and analyses of mothers' empirical data. It has described the precarious nature of returners' position at the back of the job queue. The returners in this study were confined to these positions by not being able to move from part-time or casual jobs to full-time or permanent jobs. Research suggests that returners in liberal nations fare worse than those in social democratic nations where

good jobs at the head of the queue are more available to returners (Appelbaum, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 2002). In most liberal nations, however, the difficulty of transitioning from part-time to full-time positions means that returners are often trapped in low status jobs. By contrast, in social democratic nations extensive and generous support to mothers and more stringent controls of the labour market contribute to returners' better market position, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Unlike returners in social democratic nations, returners in liberal nations fare worse in terms of employment opportunities and pay (Dixon, 1996 and 2000; Purcell, 2000, pp. 121-132). In most liberal nations, research suggests that mothers are over-represented in flexible or part-time and low status jobs at the back of the queue (Baker, 2001, pp. 147-154; Bruegel, 1996, pp. 175-176; Ferber & Nelson, 1999; Fitzsimons, 2002, pp. 73-9; Gordon & Morton, 2001, p. 79; Hill, 2004; Hyman, 2004; McPherson, 2005; Stredwick & Ellis, 2005). For the returners in the current project, flexible or part-time work is accompanied by low pay, contributing to the widening gender pay gap. In addition, participants found it difficult to move beyond the barriers to better paid positions further up the queue. The difficulty of progressing to full-time or even permanent part-time jobs and the high marginal effective taxation rate (METRs) in most liberal welfare nations contribute to the poverty traps facing returners (OECD, 2006, pp. 35-68; Tomlinson, 2006a).

Conclusions to Chapters Six to Eight

In summary, the accounts of the participants in this section (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight) suggest that employers' relegation of mothers to the back of the queue benefits the wider society more than it does the mothers themselves. Men as husbands/partners, fathers, and employers all benefit from mothers' lowly market position and they have a vested interest in keeping the status quo. By contrast, mothers who take career breaks suffer various disadvantages. In addition to loss of career and incomes, the participants in this study also suggested that when on employment breaks, they felt under-valued. They linked this under-valuation with a loss of self-confidence that contributed to their weak bargaining position at home and in paid work.

Research suggests that an individual's identity is closely tied up with his/her work identity. In general, one's evaluation of one's self is attached to external things such as a job, money and prestige (Crittenden, 2001, p. 235; Sichtermann, 1988; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004, p. 60). Research further suggests that in most industrialised nations, paid work is valued more than care work and full-time jobs more than part-time jobs (Crompton & Birkelund, 2000; Crompton, Dennett & Wigfield, 2003, pp. 6-19; Garey, 2003). Individuals who cannot commit fully to paid work in terms of hours and continuity are less valued (Applebaum, 2002, pp. 94 -95). The mothers in the current project were affected by such attitudes and perceptions.

The participants' accounts indicated that the mothers were disadvantaged both at home and in the workplace. The lower pay and status of partnered mothers meant that they and their children continued to be financially dependent on the main earner of the household. These mothers were obliged to prioritise their partners' careers and to ensure that their participation in paid work did not affect the smooth working of their households. By contrast, their husbands and partners were able to continue in paid work as normal. In the paid workforce, participants reported feeling disempowered when they were excluded from participating fully in the normal day-to-day activities in the workplace. When negotiating or renegotiating paid work contracts, these participants reported being obliged to accept inferior employment terms and conditions, perpetuating their labour market disadvantage.

In this chapter I have explored the paid work experiences of returners. In general this study found that returners' experiences of employment had not lived up to their hope of finding the light at the end of the tunnel. In the next chapter I explore employers' attitudes and practices, and compare them with mothers' accounts described in Chapters Six to Eight.

CHAPTER NINE: WHAT THE EMPLOYERS SAY

Introduction

This chapter reports on the employers' survey. It explores employers' beliefs, attitudes and workplace practices that influence returners' employment experiences. The chapter integrates findings from the mail survey of employers with findings from several face-to-face interviews with employers. Findings from the in-depth interviews with employers provide additional insight into the quantitative data obtained from the mail questionnaire. This chapter sets the context within which to compare employers' claims about their workplace practices and returners' accounts of their employment experiences. The following chapter highlights and interprets the areas of incongruence in the two accounts.

Some of the main factors that mothers identified as limiting re-entry to career type jobs were childcare, employers' attitudes and practices, the costs of returning, access to re-training and job-related networks. In this chapter, these factors are discussed from the viewpoints of employers.

Barriers to employing returners

Employers participating in the in-depth interviews as well as the mail survey were asked to identify the key factor that made it difficult to employ returners. As discussed in the last three chapters, mothers identified childcare, retraining costs, recognition of skills and qualifications, age and self-confidence as key barriers to their getting full-time jobs at the head of the job and gender queues. Findings from the survey of employers, however, suggest that of the constraints that mothers identified, employers acknowledged mothers' responsibility for childcare as the biggest challenge to employing returners. Employers' perception that mothers are not free to participate in paid work full-time disadvantages returners: career jobs at the head of the queue are frequently full-time, whereas part-time jobs are less likely to have career opportunities, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Childcare

As illustrated in Table 4 below, over half the employers (53.25%) stated that a mother's inability to work full-time constituted the biggest challenge to them as

employers. Of these 18 percent strongly agreed. Less than a third (27.33%) of employers did not consider mothers' childcare constraints as a limiting factor to employing them.

Table 4. Employers' biggest challenge: A mother's inability to work full-time

Category	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	25	18.0
agree	49	35.25
neither agree nor disagree	19	13.67
disagree	23	16.54
strongly disagree	15	10.79
no opinion	8	5.75
Total	N=139*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

Returners' training needs

Mothers' accounts suggested that they felt employers regarded their qualifications and skills as out-dated and that employers expected them to have current paid work-related skills and experiences. Since retraining returners would involve additional costs, it was hypothesised that employers might be reluctant to hire returners. However, contrary to mothers' reports, employers generally did not consider mothers' retraining needs to be a major constraint to employing returners. Further, most employers did not appear to consider returners as in need of retraining.

Of the few employers who claimed to provide training, 81.2 percent said they provided training as part of on-going staff development or on an 'as needed' basis. On-the-job training appeared to be training provided informally through a work buddy or a mentor (usually also the supervisor). This finding correlates with mothers' accounts, discussed in Chapter Eight, suggesting employer funded training was often short, basic, and not transferable. For instance, in some jobs such as check out and clerical assistants, returners reported being given basic and short-hours training to do mostly with how to operate workplace technology.

Less than a third of the employers said they placed high value on retraining. These employers suggested a mother's willingness to participate in training indicated her commitment to paid work. In this case, they suggested they were more willing to provide the necessary assistance toward training as part of the job offer. Such assistance could be in the form of paid days to attend lectures, a contribution toward course fees or access to in-house training (which is not always available to part-time employees). One employer (interviewed) suggested he tried to fit training into the remuneration package. He explained:

One of the things that we try to fit in [in lieu of pay] is training. I'd rather give people [returners] training and flexibility. People could move from this job to another job with better money [once they have gained paid work experience or training].

He also indicated that in hiring he would often take account of what the person had done to become work-ready. He continued:

I think I'm very influenced by commitment to training. We recently employed a woman returner over another person who was after *a lot more money!* [my italics]. The person who had taken time off had worked quite hard to do a diploma. And that really influenced me – ongoing education and commitment to training.

Nevertheless, any employer provision of training and flexible hours has a cost attached (as in the example above). The returner he employed appeared to have paid for the training herself. The fact that the employer paid her less than the other person who wanted more money suggests that this was more an economic than an altruistic appointment. Such practices affect returners' employment opportunities. As indicated in Chapter Five, many mothers who could not afford to re-train felt disadvantaged when looking for career type jobs and this contributed to delayed returns.

Returners' skills and qualifications

Also contrary to mothers' accounts, more than half of the employers (60.8%) claimed they would not view mothers' qualifications and skills as a major obstacle to

employing them. Almost half (42.8%) of the employers who responded disagreed that returners lacked job-relevant skills. In fact over a quarter of the employers who responded claimed returners had the ability to quickly learn job relevant skills if required.

Employers in the education area were more likely to suggest returners had valuable motherhood-related skills that could be adapted and applied to a classroom situation. These employers viewed mature returners as a highly skilled but flexible workforce that could be used to their advantage. For instance, one school principal suggested that relieving teaching positions or positions that only required a few hours each week were not attractive to people looking for a career in teaching, but would be suitable for mothers who could combine such hours with childcare.

In addition, employers appeared to value mothers' life experience for jobs where contact with clients was important. For one employer who often had to host public functions, being able to employ a more mature woman was important, since the job often entailed having to deal with a wide range of people. These employers saw older returners as possessing people skills. In this instance too, the employers appeared to value returners as a cheap but relatively skilled labour force. One such employer explained:

[Older returners] have the ability and probably some life experience...they are not going to be intimidated and they would appear credible...if a person is very young it may present a challenge.

However, as also found in other research, while employers valued older women workers for their flexibility and life skills, they were often reluctant to provide training for these workers. Older men, on the other hand, though seen more negatively as more inflexible, were more likely to be targeted for re-training in such places as Australia, for instance (Ainsworth, 2002).

The employers in the study for this research made no secret about the potential to save costs by being able to trade flexibility with pay. Some compared the 'mature' returner with a younger person, who they saw as having less paid work experience so both

could be paid less. However, by employing a returner with the better interpersonal skills, employers saw returners as providing “better value for your buck than someone who may be younger with the same level of time in the workforce.” Employers’ perceptions that returners were a source of cheap labour (any skills they brought with them could be seen as a bonus) allowed them to offer returners low status and temporary positions at the back of the queue. Such practices are reflected in mothers’ comments about ‘starting over’ in re-entry positions.

Further, employers did not appear to differentiate between returners who had acquired informal qualifications and skills from doing voluntary/community work and returners who did not, again confirming mothers’ accounts that employers saw them as the same kind of labour regardless of their skills and financial responsibilities. As shown in Table 5 below, less than a third (29.4%) of employers thought mothers who had non-paid work experience were more employable than other returners. In fact, one employer suggested that experience in such positions as chairperson of a school trustee board, or treasurer of an organisation, would make a difference only if the returner could illustrate her skills with, for example, ways in which she had contributed to changes in the organisation. By contrast, mothers who had participated in such unpaid work felt they had gained valuable work-related skills from such work.

In addition, while mothers could recount their experiences of being turned down for jobs because employers thought their career breaks had led to loss of skills, less than a quarter of employers (38.3 percent) agreed with this perception. A third of employers (32.4 percent) suggested that they did not link employment breaks with loss of skills or competences. By contrast, employers suggested that shorter employment breaks would have no or minimal effects on a mother’s career. This may be because employers often linked a career break with maternity or parental leave only. They appeared overly optimistic in regard to mothers’ ability to ‘crack the glass ceiling’. As the following employer said:

A returner in my firm had two years out of paid work but retained her skills (chartered accountancy environment). They [returners] are good employees.

In some cases this had occurred. Another employer commented:

A peer in our senior management team has had two children whilst in our company and she has developed from a junior role to a senior executive in our company. Glass ceiling broken!

However, employers were likely then to believe that this could happen with any suitable returner.

Table 5. Mothers who have voluntary work experience are more employable than those without

Category	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	5	3.8
agree	34	25.6
neither agree nor disagree	36	27.1
disagree	32	24.1
strongly disagree	14	10.5
no opinion	12	9.0
Total	N=133*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

These employers also believed mothers who took career breaks were not treated differently from other employees. They suggested that mothers would have no problem resuming a career even at senior level. As one respondent said, returners “quickly fit back into the work environment. All have come back part-time but change to full-time after a period.” Another employer wrote:

We have both senior managers and lower grade staff who have returned to work following parental leave – some twice – and have had no negative change in behaviour or work output.

Typically these comments suggest there is no penalty attached to part-time employment, as long as the individual is able to keep up with productivity. The downside of a mail survey is that it was difficult to clarify whether these mothers had,

in effect, been employed on a continuous basis and had taken only short maternity leave. It was also not possible to clarify whether they could have progressed further had they not had children.

However, conversations with the employers interviewed face-to-face suggested they were mostly concerned with issues facing mothers who had taken short maternity breaks when they discussed career progress. Certainly for returners in this study, extended time out of paid work (5-10 years or more) made it difficult for them to return to career type jobs that have better conditions (longer hours, permanence, good pay and opportunities for progress). As seen in the mothers' accounts (Chapters Six to Eight), returning to casual or part-time employment limited their career options. While mothers may not all want careers, it is very likely that they would prefer jobs with options or at least better pay and conditions. Such jobs are mostly located at the head of or further up the queue than are the jobs currently available to mothers who have taken extended career breaks for children.

As discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, even mothers on short maternity leave who return to the same level job are less likely to achieve at the same level as their childless counterparts in continuous employment. In practice, most employers, viewed (extended) career breaks (as was the case with most of the mothers in this study) as equating to less human capital (paid work experience and work-related skills), making it less likely that these mothers would be considered for promotion into higher level or full-time employment. As one employer explained, career breaks make it harder for employers to consider returners for senior positions:

My perception is that they [returners] may not have the same experience. They may have 6-7 years [of paid work experience] compared with someone who has 15 years so in terms of a senior management role, for instance.

The female employers (interviewed) who had had career breaks themselves agreed that extended breaks would affect career progress. One of these employers used her own relatively slow career progress to demonstrate the effect of career breaks on mothers. She suggested that had she not taken an extended break, she would have

achieved her current (senior management) position sooner. As it was, she explained that she did many years of part-time work while her children were younger.

Returners' age and self-confidence

While older mothers reported being discriminated against because of their age, the majority of employers (76%) claimed they did not view age as a barrier to hiring older returners (a claim to indicate they are working within legal requirements that prohibits ageism). By contrast, many mothers were able to recount incidences where they felt employers had a preference for younger (especially male) candidates, as reported in the previous chapter. They also reported finding it harder to compete even for low-level service jobs, such as supermarket checkout positions, since employers appeared to prefer tertiary or school leavers for such positions.

In addition, while the mothers in this project suggested their low self-confidence contributed to a weak bargaining position in paid work, more than half of the employers (52.7%) did not view a mother's confidence as a barrier to hiring them. Nevertheless, some employers (especially those in the face-to-face interviews) suggested that returners were less confident about 'selling themselves,' supporting mothers' claims that they did not feel confident about using motherhood-related skills to support their job applications.

Clearly there are discrepancies between these mothers' accounts of their employment experiences, and employers' accounts of their beliefs and practices. These discrepancies will be further explained in the next chapter where I discuss to employers' strategies to accommodate returners' employment. The accounts of mothers in this study suggested that they did not have employer support in returning to paid work. To a large extent, the employers' accounts confirm mothers' views in this regard.

Employer support toward returning: Family friendly practices

As indicated in Chapter Three, in liberal nations, having children is seen as a lifestyle choice. The predominant view is that mothers and fathers should shoulder the costs associated with children. The survey of employers suggests that employers largely

subscribe to this view. Most employers were reluctant to provide family friendly work practices, such as childcare and paid leave.

Childcare

Most of the employers (86%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “childcare expenses should be partially funded by the employer”. Of these 57.9% strongly disagreed with the statement as indicated in Table 6 below. Predictably, an even higher percentage of employers (93.4%) disagreed with the view that they should be totally responsible for the childcare expenses of their employees. Of these, 73.6 percent strongly disagreed (Table 7 below).

The employers who were interviewed suggested that their organisations could not afford to fund childcare, although several claimed to be able to accommodate returners in other ways. In the bank, for instance, there was some provision toward employer-funded childcare, where mothers were able to use a designated and subsidised formal childcare centre near the bank. However, this appeared to be aimed more at young and permanent, mostly full-time female employees. The employers in secondary schools and local government said mothers could bring their children to the workplace after school or if the children were unwell. At one of the workplaces, the employer claimed to have facilities where the children and their mothers could make and have afternoon tea.

Table 6. Childcare expenses should be partially funded by the employer

Category	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	2	1.7
agree	2	1.7
neither agree nor disagree	9	7.4
disagree	34	28.1
strongly disagree	70	57.9
no opinion	4	3.3
Total	N=121*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

Table 7. Childcare expenses should be fully funded by the employer

Category	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	3	2.5
agree	0	0.0
neither agree nor disagree	1	0.8
disagree	24	19.8
strongly disagree	89	73.6
no opinion	4	3.3
Total	N=121*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

Nevertheless, a large number of employers (69.4%) agreed that childcare expenses should be the total responsibility of the parent. Nearly a quarter (38.8%) of employers strongly agreed with the view that childcare expenses should be the total responsibility of the individual, as indicated in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Childcare expenses should be the total responsibility of the individual

Category	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	52	38.8
agree	41	30.6
neither agree nor disagree	16	11.9
disagree	15	11.2
strongly disagree	7	5.2
no opinion	3	2.2
Total	134*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

Almost half of the employers (42.8%) supported the view that childcare expenses should be partially funded by the government. Another 40.4 percent of employers were opposed to state support funding of childcare expenses, as indicated in Table 9.

Even more employers (47.9%) strongly disagreed with the view that “childcare expenses should fully funded by the government”, as indicated in Table 10 below. Since state funding of childcare comes from taxation, employers might see increased

state funding in this area as potentially increasing corporate taxes, thus adding to production costs. This finding goes somewhat towards explaining the current lack of employer-funded childcare.

Table 9. Childcare expenses should be partially funded by the government

Category	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	11	8.7
agree	43	34.1
neither agree nor disagree	17	13.5
disagree	25	19.8
strongly disagree	26	20.6
no opinion	4	3.2
Total	N=126*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

Table 10. Childcare expenses should be fully funded by the government

Category	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	6	5.0
agree	6	5.0
neither agree nor disagree	13	10.7
disagree	35	28.9
strongly disagree	58	47.9
no opinion	3	2.5
Total	N=121*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

Paid parental leave

The employers in this study appeared reluctant to provide leave over and above statutory leave. While employers are required by law to provide 14 weeks of paid parental leave (paid for by taxpayers for childbirth), most employers suggested it was difficult to accommodate mothers who require longer leave. The employers who responded to the survey were strongly opposed to employer funded leave. Most (89.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “paid parental leave should be the total responsibility of the employer”. The strength of feeling on this

issue could be seen in the high number of employers (63.9%) who strongly disagreed with the view that the employer should be totally responsible for paid parental leave as shown in Table 11 below.

Table 11. Paid parental leave should be the total responsibility of the employer

category	frequency	percentage
strongly agree	3	2.5
agree	2	1.6
neither agree nor disagree	6	4.9
disagree	31	25.4
strongly disagree	78	63.9
no opinion	2	1.6
Total	N=122*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

However, the employers were more supportive of state funded parental leave. A large number of employers (66.9%) agreed with the statement that “paid parental leave should be the total responsibility of the government”, with 40.6 percent strongly agreeing with this statement, as shown in Table 12 below. The champion of paid parental leave for New Zealand mothers, Laila Harre, however, suggested that state funding of paid parental leave in reality was a subsidy to employers. She felt that it would be fairer for employers to provide some financial support toward paid parental leave, since mothers who have access to such leave were more likely to stay attached to the paid workforce (personal communication).

Nevertheless, even partial employer funding of leave appeared unpopular with employers. A large number (64.0 %) of respondents disagreed with the statement that “Paid parental leave should be the shared expense of the government and the employer”. Almost half of the employers (45.1%) strongly disagreed, and only 21.3% agreed with this statement, as shown in Table 13 below.

Table 12. Paid parental leave should be the total responsibility of the government

category	frequency	percentage
strongly agree	54	40.6
agree	35	26.3
neither agree nor disagree	11	8.3
disagree	14	10.5
strongly disagree	19	14.3
no opinion	0	0.0
Total	N=133*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

Several employers even suggested that asking employers to provide paid leave would increase their production costs and increase discrimination against mothers and women of childbearing age generally. One of the employers interviewed, for instance, claimed she knew of employers who had either discriminated in this way or who would be likely to discriminate in this way. Employers in the mail survey also shared this view. One of the mail survey employers wrote:

Employer funded parental leave will detrimentally affect the ability of women to gain employment and promotions and salary increases. Discrimination will increase!

Table 13. Paid parental leave should be the shared expense of the government and the employer

category	frequency	percentage
strongly agree	6	4.9
agree	20	16.4
neither agree nor disagree	16	13.1
disagree	23	18.9
strongly disagree	55	45.1
no opinion	2	1.6
Total	N=122*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

Several employers explained that mothers who took parental and maternity leave created additional problems for management to solve. As the following email from a participant suggested, mothers taking leave were regarded as likely to cause interruptions in the workplace:

I certainly would not employ a woman of childbearing age, because if she became pregnant the firm would have to find temporary relief staff.

In other cases, employers suggested that providing paid leave to mothers disadvantaged other workers, especially those who were self-employed. One employer wrote:

The women I employ can have paid time off to look after their new babies but as I am the 'boss' I cannot. The women I employ are around the same age as me. Do you think that is fair?

The extension of paid parental leave to the self-employed in December 2005 is a step toward a more universal provision of leave. Currently, as mothers' experiences suggest, employers' reluctance to provide support to mothers contribute to the broken careers of the returners in this study.

Flexible employment

Employers' perception that mothers were unable to work full-time appeared to influence the types of jobs they offered returners. The majority of employers (93.3%) appeared to believe that offering flexible hours of work was the best way to engage mothers in paid work. As mothers' accounts revealed, however, such offers represented starting over in low status jobs at the back of the queue. Most employers (84.3%) saw offering casual hours that fit in with childcare was also a good way to encourage mothers to return, as seen in Table 14 below.

These employers appeared to believe that mothers could start out in such positions and progress to full-time work over time. However, mothers' accounts suggested it was difficult to move from part-time/casual employment to full-time and permanent positions: most mothers were trapped in these low-level positions.

Further, while employers suggested that they offered flexible employment as a way to assist mothers into paid work, mothers' accounts suggested that employment flexibility was generally associated with lower pay and status: mothers did not feel they could resume a career from being employed part-time. Employers, however, appeared to believe that offering mothers casual and part-time positions enabled them to acquire work-related skills while also being able to take care of children. Employers tended to gloss over issues of low pay, while focusing on the so-called advantages of flexible employment. They appeared to assume that returners would be happy with flexibility, and were able to rationalise their offers with non-monetary considerations. As the following employer claimed:

You can either pay [returners] a heap of money or you can make the job interesting and provide some flexibility [but with lower pay].

Table 14. The best way to encourage mothers to return to paid work

category	Offer flexible hours	Offer casual hours of work that fit in with childcare
	percentage	percentage
strongly agree	28.1	14.9
agree	65.2	69.4
neither agree nor disagree	3.7	6.0
disagree	1.5	5.2
strongly disagree	0.0	1.5
no opinion	1.5	3.0
Total	N=100*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

The accounts of the mothers (reported in Chapters Six to Eight) suggested that employers often built low pay into offers of flexible work. To test whether employers would admit this was part of their strategy in employing returners, an item was included that related to low pay. This was a deliberate strategy, as there were employers interviewed, who suggested that trading pay for flexibility was fair exchange. There appears to be a perception that family-friendliness can be traded for lower pay.

Contrary to the experiences of the mothers in this study, the majority of employers (85.3%) claimed they did not see low pay as the best strategy to assist mothers into paid work. They also claimed that they did not often offer short-term contracts and definitely not on low pay. As indicated in Table 15 below, more employers (39.2%) disagreed than agreed (25.3%) with the statement that short-term contracts were the best strategy to get mothers into paid work. This differs from the mothers' experiences of being in the worst jobs at the back of the job queue, where the pay was usually low and the terms of employment precarious. In most cases, flexibility served production purposes better than the needs of mothers. For instance, organisations that offered mothers casual hours of employment, during peak hours (as in banking and fast food outlets), allowed employers to meet customer demands.

Table 15. The best way to encourage mothers to return to paid work

category	Offer S-T contracts	Offer lower pay
	percentage	percentage
strongly agree	4.6	2.3
agree	20.8	2.3
neither agree nor disagree	32.3	8.5
disagree	27.7	43.4
strongly disagree	11.5	41.9
no opinion	3.1	1.6
Total	N=100*	100

* Some employers did not employ mothers and chose not to answer this item.

Employers' recruitment practices

In Chapter Two, it was suggested that employers' recruitment practices contributed to mothers' lowly market position. The questionnaire for this study therefore sought to explore the most common practices that employers used to recruit and select their employees.

In general the employers in this study used both formal and informal recruitment practices. Formal recruitment methods included advertisements in newspapers, recruitment agencies, and the New Zealand Employment Service, as well as internal company websites. Informal recruitment practices were those that used word-of-

mouth, using informal contacts such as current employees, friends, relatives or spouses and partners of both employers and employees, as well as cold calls (where individuals “dropped in” and left information about themselves with employers).

Formal recruitment methods

Slightly more employers (54.92%) used formal than informal (45.08%) recruitment methods. Although some mothers reported that they were able to obtain employment through informal networks, most returners claimed that they searched for job vacancies by looking in the job sections of newspapers (especially locally published newspapers). It could be argued that if employers placed job advertisements in local newspapers, more mothers would have access to such information. However, most career type jobs appeared to be advertised through internal websites and national newspapers, potentially excluding returners. In addition, mothers suggested that they were disadvantaged by employers’ reliance on job interviews, curricula vitae and reference from a third party, such as a past or current employer or colleague.

Job interviews and curricula vitae

In line with mothers’ comments, the employers’ survey indicated that employers depended predominantly on the job interview and curriculum vitae in vetting suitable employees. Most employers (83%) claimed that they made use of formal job interviews ‘100 percent of the time’, with fewer (12.7%) using them ‘occasionally’ and only a minority (4.3%) ‘never’ using them.

As discussed in Chapter Two, job interviews have inherent biases and are likely to disadvantage marginal workers, including returners. In this study, mothers claimed that they were less likely to apply for jobs that required them to produce a curriculum vitae, for instance. However, employers claimed that for most casual and short-term positions, they did not require such criteria. The mothers’ accounts confirmed this.

Many of the interviewers in the mail survey (65.4%) appeared to be ‘untrained’, though employers claimed that they were ‘experienced’. Less than a tenth (9.8 %) of the respondents claimed to use ‘highly’ trained interviewers with only a quarter (25.6%) using trained interviewers. This could cause some problems for returners since inexperienced or untrained interviewers were more likely to depend on personal

biases when making decisions about who to hire, as indicated in Chapter Two. The frequent use of untrained interviewers could explain the high rate of mothers who claimed that employers discriminated against them.

Wording in job advertisements

Mothers' accounts suggested they were sensitive to the way employers worded their job vacancies. For instance, job vacancies that list attributes such as 'recent graduates', 'energetic' and 'forward thinking' (examples of phrases seen in some job advertisements) would discourage returners from applying for these jobs. By contrast, since mothers with dependent children are often constrained by childcare, advertisements that listed flexible working schedules would attract the attention of mothers looking for work. Employers in this study were therefore asked about the wording in their job advertisements.

Employers looking to fill vacancies with a flexible labour supply such as that provided by mothers, suggested that they would include references to flexible work schedules in their advertisements. Most employers indicated that they would commonly list jobs as 'permanent part-time' (95 mentions), has 'flexible hours' (69 mentions) or 'temporary part-time' (46 mentions), suggesting that they created part-time jobs for specific purposes. Returners with childcare constraints would be drawn to such job offers, though in practice, many mothers with older children would prefer to return to longer hours and secure employment. However, the survey results suggest that the employers in this study were more likely to create part-time jobs, especially in service occupations. This correlates with mothers' accounts of being constrained by the jobs available to them.

Informal recruitment methods

The informal methods that employers claimed they frequently used included (in descending order) informal contacts such as partners, relatives, friends and business associates, as well as 'cold calls', where people looking for jobs would call at a workplace and leave their contact details so they could be considered for future job vacancies. Employers looking to fill casual and short-term positions, for example, claimed they referred to the network provided by current employees to fill such vacancies. Since mothers on career breaks often lose contact with paid work-related

networks, recruitment through such informal channels potentially limits returners' employment opportunities. As indicated in Chapter Six, returners with informal contacts, especially in the rural areas, suggested they had no difficulty in getting short-term employment, while those without such contacts did not fare as well.

[It could be argued that mothers who take extended breaks cannot expect jobs at the head of the queue. However, it can also be argued that mothers returning from doing the essential work of bearing and rearing children should not be disadvantaged. As we have seen, efforts have been made to ensure that soldiers who have been defending their country do not lose subsequent career opportunities as a result.

The argument proposed in this thesis is that employers' recruitment practices such as the formal interview and requirement for references from current employers have biases against mothers who have not been in continuous paid work. It is also argued that practices can be altered to recognise the skills and competences of mothers returning to the paid work force, as described in Chapter Three. Returners can be better assisted into careers through the use of tools such as workplace assessment centres, identification of prior learning and skills acquired through informal/unpaid work.

Ways of keeping in touch with returners

Research suggests that employers can assist mothers to maintain workplace contacts by keeping in touch with mothers on employment breaks, and by treating mothers on maternity leave as part of their 'normal' workforce (Beck & Steel, 1989, pp. 82-93). However, the employers in this study did not appear to have many strategies to keep in touch with mothers on career breaks.

Most (76.9 percent) of the employers stated they did not have ways to encourage mothers to return to their organisations. Less than a third (23.1%) of respondents claimed to have ways of maintaining contact with mothers on career breaks. Of these, the most preferred methods were invitations to participate in staff functions (75%), informal visits to workplaces (50%), opportunities for relieving work (46.9%), and participation in staff meetings (34.4 percent). Other less commonly cited methods were contacts via emails (21.9%), newsletters, and membership of staff club (both at 12.5%). The longer the employment break, however, the less likely employers were to

maintain contact. No employer claimed to maintain contact with mothers on extended career breaks.

Employers' perceptions of returners' paid work performance

Finally, employers were also asked to indicate their level of satisfaction from employing returners. Overall, the survey suggests that these New Zealand employers were mostly satisfied with the paid work performance of returners.

Most (92.4%) of the employers surveyed reported their experience of employing mothers as positive. They saw them as dedicated, committed employees who “did not muck about” and who possessed valuable interpersonal skills and generally represented “value for money.” The most common attributes they linked with returners included, “able to get on with the task without needing supervision”, “mature”, “have life experience so can deal with situations as they arise”, “able to take initiative”, “reliable”, and “able to get on with colleagues and customers”.

Some employers particularly appreciated the work ethics of more mature returners. In addition to being on-task, they suggested (older) returners were able to work cooperatively. As one employer suggested, “Older [mothers] are generally more committed/dedicated and realise that the employer/employee relationship is a two-way commitment.” Another employer suggested that returners had a positive effect on the workplace, in that they could positively influence the workplace atmosphere. The following employer comment illustrates: “Returning mothers are cheerful, positive, enthusiastic people. This affects customers and provides entertainment in the staff room.”

Nevertheless, there were also a few employers who viewed returners negatively. These employers claimed returners were difficult to train, did not fit into the company culture, were too old and slow to learn new skills, and were unable to cope in crisis situations. They were also more likely to believe that returners lacked commitment to paid work and had a higher rate of absenteeism. For instance, they suggested returners needed too many concessions. As the following employer explained, “[Returners] are only willing to work certain hours. They have more time off due to child's ill health (over standard entitlement).”

Although all employees are liable to become sick or have relatives that they may need to take time off work for, these employers appeared to connect returners with more absenteeism, due to family needs. This negative perception of returners would influence hiring and promotional decisions. The following employer suggested:

[Returners] can be unreliable as far as things outside their control (e.g. sick children, sick husbands/partners, school issues, family obligations) mean. They would need to leave without prior notice. [Further] they cannot work over-time because of 'awkward' hours.

These employers also believed returners in part-time positions disrupted the workflow and needed the support of other employees to fill in their roles when they were not at work. An employer wrote:

[Returners] only work part-time so someone else has to do their job on the days they are away (company employs 31 females and 33 males full-time; 5 part-time females and 1 casual female staff).

Such comments reflected mothers' accounts in regard to the difficulties they sometimes had with work colleagues discussed in the previous chapter. On the whole, however, there were more employers who expressed positive views of returners than those who held more negative views. Nevertheless, as mothers' accounts suggested, they were less likely to compensate this by offering returners better pay and positions.

Summary and discussion

The findings suggest that the employers in this study saw mothers' childcare responsibility as the most significant barrier to offering them full-time (career type) jobs. The majority of employers responded to this constraint by offering returners flexible but low status jobs at the back of the queue, supporting mothers' views that employers did not see them as suitable for full-time jobs located further up the queue.

However, such flexibility appeared to benefit the employers more than the returners, as indicated in Chapter Five. Research suggests that jobs in male-dominated occupations have functional flexibility, because such jobs fit in more with the needs

and demands of employees (Daune-Richard, 2000, pp. 7-11; Dex & Scheibl, 2000; Haar, 2005; Reimer, 2003, pp. 136-137). By contrast, the mothers in this study were offered contingent flexibility, where flexible schedules and work were created to meet employers' market needs, rather than mothers' needs for paid work hours that fit in with childcare. The precarious nature of the jobs that the mothers in this study were offered meant that they were vulnerable to employers' preferences in regard to work hours and schedules.

Further, as with other research (Daly, 2000; McKie, Bowlby & Gregory, 2001, pp. 233-258), the employers in this study were reluctant to contribute to the costs of childcare. Most employers believed parents should be responsible for the costs associated with having children. Apart from offering flexible employment (mostly low status and low paid) to assist mothers into paid employment, employers were reluctant to fund other family friendly provision, such as paid parental leave and childcare. This lack of support limits mothers' employment opportunities.

They were also reluctant to meet the costs of employing returners. Most of the mothers in this study did not receive employer-funded training. By contrast, employers appeared able to benefit from employing returners. For instance, by requiring returners to pay for their own training, employers could save on production costs. By offering part-time and short-term employment these employers were also able to avoid paying for mothers' retraining needs: research suggests that part-time employees are generally less likely to be given on-the-job training (Jenkins, 2004, pp. 121-124; Miller, 1993; Rubery, 1994, pp. 343-345).

On the whole, however, the survey results suggested that employers were generally satisfied with the work of returners. It seems clear that employers appreciated the skills and attributes that returners brought to the workplace. However, by not compensating returners adequately for possessing these skills, employers' beliefs, perceptions and workplace practices contributed to the relegation of returners to the back of the queue. These employers could be said to free ride on mothers' disadvantaged position.

This chapter has provided an overview of the findings on the employers' survey and compared them with the accounts of mothers. There seems to be some discrepancy between the experiences of mothers returning to paid work and the stated claims of the employers in this study. This and other key issues identified in the study will be discussed further in the next chapter. In the final chapter, recommendations based on the conclusions of this study will be provided to improve mothers' re-entry employment opportunities.

SECTION THREE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER TEN: BARRIERS AGAINST EQUITY

Introduction

A key aim of this study was to explore the paid work experiences of a group of returners in one liberal nation, New Zealand. The study also investigated labour market processes and the extent of social policy support for returners. This chapter integrates the literature and empirical findings about the experiences of these mothers with findings from the employers' survey. The chapter summarises and discusses the impacts of employers' beliefs, assumptions and practices, as well as the level of support and protection provided by the state legislative framework to returners in New Zealand.

This chapter also uses the adapted job queues/gender queues model to explain the discrepancies in the reports of mothers and employers. It identifies employers' beliefs, assumptions and practices as factors that relegate returners to the back of the queue and suggests that while state legislation provides some protection against overt discriminatory practices, labour market regulation in a liberal nation like New Zealand is relatively weak, compared with that in social democratic nations. Employers acting within the legislative framework in most liberal nations are still able to discriminate on the ground of gender and parenthood. The first half of this chapter traces the processes contributing to employers' placing of returners at the back of the queue. It then links such practices to socio-cultural factors that contribute to the under-valuation of mothers and motherhood-related tasks, arguing that returners' current lowly market position affects mothers' bargaining position on the domestic as well as work fronts, contributing to persistent gender and labour market inequities.

In New Zealand as in most liberal nations, the national and international legislative frameworks provide poor support and protection for returners. As discussed in Chapter Two, concepts of labour market equities can be explored from three key dimensions of equity, in terms of: equity as pay equity and equal access to opportunities to occupations and career progress; equity as equal opportunities and equal constraints; and equity as full integration in both paid and unpaid work (Bailyn, 2003, pp. 139-140). Findings from this study suggest that currently New Zealand

returners do not have labour market equity on any of these three dimensions. Indeed, a tradition of low support for mothers and weak labour market regulation have allowed employers to place returners, as the least preferred group, at the back of the queue.

Divergences between mothers' and employers' accounts

The previous chapter identified some areas of incongruence between mothers' reported experiences, and employers' claims about workplace practices. In particular, the employers in this study regarded their policies as giving mothers what they were presumed to want, suggesting that flexible work enabled returners to combine paid work and childcare. Employers' assumptions that mothers' paid work was of secondary importance influenced their offer of low-paid and low status jobs to mothers. However, the mothers in this study did not share the view that part-time and casual work was in their best interests. Both partnered and sole mothers wanted more hours of paid work as well as better employment security and pay, conditions linked with decent work as opposed to those of part-time and other forms of precarious work.

Further, while mothers claimed that they experienced discrimination on the basis of gender and age as well as parenthood, the employers overwhelmingly claimed they believed in equal treatment. They suggested that every potential employee would be selected according to the same criteria (that they would be able to carry out the required tasks), and that no one was discriminated against. However, it seemed unlikely that they would have offered fathers part-time and casual work.

In addition, while some employers suggested that they valued returners for their maturity and life experiences, the majority appeared to assume that mothers who took career breaks lost skills and competences. Even when employers claimed that they valued returners' non-paid work experiences, they did not appear to place those skills in the same category as formally acquired skills. On the contrary, the findings suggest that employers were able to place both highly skilled and low skilled returners in low status occupations. By not offering better pay and work conditions in line with mothers' skills and qualifications, the employers in fact under valued the very skills and experiences that they purported to value. Further, by assuming that career breaks led to loss of skills, employers were able to place even highly skilled returners at the

back of the job queue and pay queue, perpetuating the perception of returners as unskilled, secondary labour, suitable for part-time but not career type jobs.

Job queues/ gender queues: Returners' job market

By adapting Reskin and Roos' (1990) model of job and gender queues, this study shows that New Zealand returners are a least preferred occupational group that occupies the back of the job queue in terms of pay, prospects and seniority. The model shows that discriminatory workplace practices, influenced by employers' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs, contributed to the downward occupational mobility of returners. On the whole, the employers appeared to regard returners as costs to be managed, rather than valuable human resources to be trained and integrated into their normal workforce. By placing returners in low status occupations, employers were able to trade flexibility for low pay. The employers also appeared able to transfer production costs to returners by making mothers pay for their own childcare and training.

Research suggests that employers are more likely to offer (functional) flexibility with good pay, status and transferable skills to facilitate career progress to preferred employees higher up the job and gender queues (Cousins & Tang, 2004, pp. 530-545; Burton, 1992; Dex, 2003; Dex & Scheibl, 2000; Dex & Smith, 2002, pp. 4-43; Frazis, Hertz & Horrigan, 1995, pp. 10-12; Giele & Stebbins, 2003, p. 225; Kilpatrick, 2006, p. 174; Maruani, 1998, pp. 5-13; OECD, 1998 and 1998b; Padovic & Reskin, 2002, p.155; Rubery, 1994, p. 342; Scott-Dixon, 2004, pp. 134-137). Less preferred employees, such as returners in low status jobs, however, are offered (contingent) flexibility, whereby employers are able to cut costs by creating part-time and short-term work to meet market demands (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1990 pp. 94-95; Dex & Scheibl, 2000; Giele & Stebbins, 2003; Hanson & Pratt, 1995, pp. 157-161; Wallen, 2002).

For the mothers in this study, flexible employment did not mean they were able to manage childcare without constraints. On the contrary, the hours of their paid work were more likely to fit in with market requirements than with their needs to fit paid work with times when their children would be at kindergartens, childcare centres or schools. For instance, returners found it difficult to take time out of paid work to look

after children on special occasions such as teacher-only days, or for parent-teacher interviews. For most mothers, low pay and irregular hours of paid work complicated their childcare arrangements and led to delayed re-entry or multiple re-entries into the labour market, each time starting over at the back of the queue.

In addition, employers were generally unwilling to provide family friendly practices such as paid (as well as unpaid) leave to contingent workers such as returners. Very few employers offered employer-funded childcare and additional paid leave. This is in line with research that suggests very few workplaces in liberal nations provide family friendly facilities to enable mothers to participate in paid work unencumbered by childcare (Mennino, Rubin & Brayfield, 2005, pp. 108-125). Where the mothers in this study were able to negotiate leave for children, they also reported that the goodwill and co-operation of the immediate supervisor was important. This supports findings from other research that suggest the cooperation of frontline supervisors and middle management is important in negotiating access to family friendly practices (Dex & Scheibl, 2000, pp. 25-26; Estes, 2004, p. 653; Glass & Fujimoto, 1995, pp. 380-407; Frazis, Hertz & Horrigan, 1995, p. 5; Sutton & Noe, 2005, pp. 151-152). Information on family friendly practices is not often widely circulated in the workplace (Rasmussen, 1996). This suggests that access to family friendly practices is variable and dependent on the goodwill of employers or their representatives.

Further, for mothers in precarious employment, access to paid leave (as well as fringe benefits associated with full-time work) is limited. While some employers suggested that requiring employers to provide extra paid leave for caregiving would increase discrimination against returners, in practice, the lack of such provision limits mothers' employment opportunities (Dex & Scheibl, 2000, pp. 22-23; Fagan, 2001, pp. 253-256; Farrell, 2005, p. 168-169; Fletcher, 2000; Hallenshead et al., 2005; Maurani, 1998, pp. 5-8; Wax, 2004).

The job and gender queues model identifies how employers' beliefs, assumptions and attitudes towards family friendly provision of paid leave and childcare influence their recruitment practices. In this study, employers' perception that mothers returning to the paid workforce are 'atypical' influences their offer of flexible but contingent labour to returners, whom they see as more suitable for the secondary labour force

than for the core or 'normal' workforce. Regardless of their claims of equal treatment, employers' assumptions about mothers' roles and beliefs about the skills and qualifications of returners contributed to their placement of returners at the back of the job and gender queues.

Explaining the persistence of discrimination against returners

Research suggests that the discrepancy between what employers say and what they do reflects the constraining influence of state legislation. Employers may wish to be seen as practising within legislation such as anti-discrimination and equal employment opportunities Acts (Pager & Quillian, 2005, pp. 361-375; Rubin, 1997; Thompson, 2003, pp. 359-368). An American study, for instance, found a discrepancy in employers' self-reports regarding the hiring of applicants with criminal records. In the study, employers reported that they were 'highly likely' to hire such applicants, but audits of hiring practices found that they were "less than half as likely to even call back" these applicants, suggesting that while their formal policies may appear to comply with legislation, their practices were clearly less compliant (Pager & Quillian, 2005, p. 366).

As illustrated by the adapted gender queues model, indirect discrimination arising from employers' attitudes, assumptions and practices is often subtle and difficult to address (Cleveland, Vescio & Barnes-Farrell, 2005, pp. 151-183; Duggan, 2003, pp. 69-73; Glass, 1999; Gorman, 2005, pp. 702-723; Petersen & Diez, 2005, p. 145). Employers' beliefs about mothers as secondary workers and fathers as primary earners influence the way paid and unpaid work is carried out and valued, contributing to discrimination against mothers (Bielby & Baron, 1986, pp. 759-790; Williams, 2000). Even simple acts, such as placing higher value on technical competence over people skills, including relational or communication skills can indirectly disadvantage individuals who do not display or possess technical competence (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher & Pruitt, 2002, p. 29).

Further, in today's labour market requirement for more intensive production, employers may well wish to practise equal and fair treatment, but are constrained by the need for flexibility (Conley, 2003, pp. 459-460; Thompson, 2003, pp. 362-365). Instead of fair treatment, employers are more likely to use mothers' time constraint to

their advantage when the labour market demands speedy responses. By placing mothers in precarious employment, for instance, employers in the study for this thesis were able to respond to fluctuating demands, without having to alter their paid workforce or increase their fixed costs to any great extent.

Employers are also influenced by their world views when recruiting and selecting staff. The majority of employers in this study appeared to be blind to the patriarchal structures that resulted in the domestic division of labour and discrimination in the workplace. Most of them did not see as problematic the gender division of childcare responsibilities, nor did they question their own roles in reinforcing the male-chief-breadwinner and female-chief-caregiver model of family life. New Zealand mothers, like mothers in most other western industrialised nations, still perform the majority of childcare and domestic labour, freeing men to participate in paid work full-time (Baker, 2001, pp. 164-173; Barnett, 2005, pp. 151-167; Benschop, Halsema & Schreurs, 2001; Bianchi, Casper & Pettola, 1999, pp. 1-3; Brines, 1994; Crompton & Harris, 1998, p. 132; Fenstermaker, West & Zimmerman, 2002, pp. 32-38; Else, 1996, pp. 2-32; Fitzsimons, 2002, pp. 114-159; Ginn, Street & Arber, 2001, pp. 22-23; Han & Moen, 1999, p. 99; Fagan & Rubery, 1999, pp. 8-9). While some European studies have found the division of labour is more equal in dual-earner households when mothers earn more than their partners, other studies have found that even in cases where men with employed wives do more domestic tasks, the time that fathers and mothers spend on domestic tasks remains unequal (Baldock & Hadlow, 2005, pp. 149-150; Baxter, 2002; Brines, 1994; Bryson, Bittman & Donath, 1994; Coltrane, 2004, pp. 208-216; Fagan & Rubery, 1999; Fine-Davis, Fagnani, Giovannini & Clarke, 2004, pp. 98-129; Irwin & Bottero, 2000; Kroska, 2004; Leon, 2005, p. 208; Lewis, 2000, pp. 54-55; Warde & Hetherington, 1993).

Men as employers, husbands or partners and women themselves appear to subscribe to mothers' role as primary childcare givers (Baxter, 2002; Bailyn, 2003; Johnson, 2005, p. 97; Lewis & Haas, 2005; Speakman & Marchington, 1999, pp. 90-100). Employers, by subscribing to the view that only men and some women without childcare responsibilities can be 'ideal workers', place fathers at the head and mothers at the back of the queue since mothers are obliged to place care work over paid work (Folbre, 1994). The mothers in this study were obliged to take flexible but low status

jobs. Research suggests that mothers, especially mothers of pre-school aged children, believe that they are the best carers of their children, making it more likely for them to prioritise childcare over paid work (Hand, 2005, pp. 10-17; Hand & Hughes, 2004, p. 48; Houston & Marks, 2005, p. 101).

Mothers' social obligation to care also extends to their obligation to place their partners' careers over their own careers (Bielby & Bielby, 1992). In dual-earner households, for instance, research suggests that mothers with high earning spouses were often pressured to reduce paid work hours in order to support the husband's career. This support includes taking employment breaks to accommodate spouses' job relocation, thereby putting mothers' own employment at risk (Bielby & Bielby, 1992; Felmler, 1995, pp. 180-181; Ginn & Arber, 1993, pp. 47-56). Mothers are often constrained to take jobs nearer their home so that they can still be available for their children and partners (Holloway, 1999, pp. 438-446; OECD, 2004, p. 17; Pratt & Hanson, 1991, p. 65).

Further, even in social democratic nations such as Sweden, known for its egalitarian attitudes, at top political and economic leadership level, mothers more than fathers are likely to be also responsible for children in the family (Daune-Richard, 1998, pp. 216-218). In Scandinavia, it is estimated that 20 percent of male leaders do the household's unpaid work, but women leaders do even more unpaid family work (Moore, 2004, pp. 210-211). In most countries, more men have spouses who are in less responsible paid work positions and can do childcare and service their husbands' careers. By contrast, most mothers in demanding jobs are married to husbands who are also in equally demanding jobs, and are less focused on helping their wives to advance their careers.

By tracing the processes whereby New Zealand returners are relegated to the back of the queue, the job and gender queues model illustrates the various ways in which returners' labour is undervalued in the workplace. The mothers in this study reported a loss of confidence that affected their employment opportunities and bargaining position in the home and in the workplace. By placing returners at the back of the queue, employers appear to mirror the wider societal attitude that places value on paid work and paid work-related tasks over motherhood and care work (Baker & Tippin,

1999, p. 173; Else, 1996; Nolan, 2000). Despite the maxim, ‘the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world’, suggesting a powerful position, most of the mothers in this study are afraid to rock the boat by protesting against their poor work conditions.

The under-valuation of care work originating from the separation of the private and public spheres contributes to inequities between mothers and non-mothers (Pfau-Effinger, 1993; and 1998, pp. 191-193; Gavron, 1966; Ginn & Arber, 1998, pp. 156-157; Seccombe, 1993, pp. 33-114; Waring, 1988; Williams, 2000). Research suggests that society places most other roles above childrearing, and individuals who can perform as normal/ ‘ideal’ workers are valued more highly than those who cannot (Crittenden, 2001; Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005, pp. 174-181; Reid, 1998, p. 530; Rostgaard, 2002; Tizard, 1986; Uttal, 2002, p. 111). Childcare, when performed in the home by the mother, is unpaid, while that performed in the public sphere is notoriously low paid (Crittenden, 2001; De Vault, 1999, pp. 52-62; Myrdal & Klein, 1956, pp. 146-147; Nelson, 2001, pp. 371-384; Preston, 2004; Woods, 1993; Oakley, 1986). In some liberal nations such as the USA, car attendants and pet minders are paid more than childcare givers (Pratt, 2003, p. 164; Rider, 2005, p. 262). Further, current social policies in most liberal nations reinforce this under-valuation (Daly & Rake, 2003; Else, 1997). However, as suggested in Chapter Three of this thesis, in the absence of state intervention, mothers’ employment opportunities are more limited and mothers’ vulnerability to poverty is greater (Esping-Andersen, 1996; Hantrais & Letablier, 1996; Woods, 1993).

As seen by the experience of the mothers in this study, despite anti-discrimination legislation on equal employment opportunities and equal pay, this attitude has persisted. Mothers who have taken career breaks are assigned low-paid jobs, contributing to the gender pay gap. In New Zealand, as elsewhere, the gender pay gap at times appears to be widening after slightly narrowing in the 1970s-early 1980s (Hyman, 2004; Gordon & Morton, 2001). In 2006 New Zealand women earned 86 percent of the hourly earnings of men: the pay gap has been reduced by only 7 percent since 1984 (<http://www.union.org.nz/campaigns/payequity.html>).

The under-valuation of the work that mothers typically perform affects mothers on several fronts. As indicated in Chapter Eight, returners linked staying at home to their

low self-confidence. When mothers return to paid work, employers' relegation of them to low status jobs compounded this and weakened the mothers' bargaining power, contributing to a lowered sense of entitlements both in the home and in the workplace.

Mothers' weak bargaining power at home

Here I argue that mothers' full or partial economic dependence affects their bargaining power and sense of entitlement in the home and in the workplace. Mothers who return to low status and low paid jobs continue to be partially dependent on their partners or, in the case of sole mothers, on the state. In the home a mother's lack of access to equal incomes weakens her bargaining power in the household, since power generally lies with those who have access to wealth-making resources often obtainable from paid work activities (Baker, 2001, pp. 152-154; Daly & Rake, 2003, p. 114; James & Saville-Smith, 1994, pp. 55-60; Kelsey, 1993; Lewis, 2002, pp. 51-55; Saville-Smith, 1987; Williams, 1993; Williams, 2000, p. 131). On the whole, the person with less power and fewer resources, normally the woman of the house, does more unpaid domestic labour, including childcare (Coltrane, 2004, p. 218; Williams, 2000). Further, the person who gets to identify what is valuable is also the person who happens to hold more economic power (Habgood, 1992, pp. 163-179; Petersen & Meyersson, 2004, p. 255).

In New Zealand, as elsewhere, the one-and-a-half earner model, where one partner works full-time and the other works part-time, is becoming more common (Callister, 1998, p. 108; Callister, 2005). However, in such families, the partner with the lower earning power (usually the mother) will focus on the career of the other partner and work part-time (Callister, 1998, pp. 101-108). Since fathers still earn more than mothers, it is usually the mother who sacrifices her own career aspirations to that of her partner. In most industrialised nations, research suggests that wives are more likely to move with the husband for his career than vice versa (Bielby & Bielby, 1992, pp. 1241-1263), again suggesting that it is the mother's role as unpaid childcare provider that limits her bargaining power at home, as also in the workplace.

Mothers' weak bargaining power in the workplace

Research suggests that a mother's primary responsibility for childcare makes it difficult for her to pursue her career goals without assistance (Adkins, 1995, p. 160; Crompton, 2006, p. 265; Crompton & Sanderson, 1990, pp. 32-177; Fagan & O'Reilly, 1998, pp. 2-4; Gottfried, 2006; Hull & Nelson, 2000, p. 232). As indicated in Chapter Four, a mother is not 'free' to sell her labour in the same way as a father because she is providing the domestic work that frees him to sell his labour full-time (Delphy & Leonard, 1992). The notion of the 'family wage', as belonging to the breadwinner, has been said to encompass three sets of entitlements, namely employers' rights to ideal workers, men's rights to be ideal workers, and children's rights to have "mothers whose lives are framed around care giving" (Williams, 2000, p. 39). A workplace culture of long hours, assumed to reflect commitment to paid work and productivity, assumes that individuals (mostly men and some childfree women) are free to work long hours in a career (Bryson, 2003, p. 244; Fletcher & Bailyn, 2005, pp. 172-176; Williams, 2000, pp. 129-141). This is a situation that most mothers cannot fulfil.

Mothers are not able to compete for decent or quality jobs at the head of the queue on the same terms as fathers or childfree women (Ferguson & Folbre, 1981, p. 328; Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, p. 1; Lewis, 2001, p. 62; Littlewood, 2004, p. 127). Mothers returning to paid work are further disadvantaged by a loss of self-confidence, associated with the low valuation of motherhood and motherhood-related tasks and care work generally. The lack of social policy support for these mothers, unlike the assistance provided for returned servicemen described in Chapter One of this thesis, reinforces and perpetuates the labour market inequity that ensues.

Returners' low bargaining position translates as a low sense of entitlement. Research in the 1980s, for instance, suggested that mothers who took career breaks for children assumed they had forfeited the right to a career: they appeared to have subscribed to the sentiment that "beggars can't be choosers" (Rothwell, 1980, pp. 175-183). More recent research also suggests that mothers are taught to expect less pay, and are less likely to ask employers or the state for support (Lewis & Haas, 2005, pp. 353-354; Padovic & Reskin, 2002, pp. 10-11). Mothers of young children are particularly

marginalized in this way (Glover & Arber, 1995; Fitzsimons, 2002, pp. 61-70; Han & Moen, 1999, pp. 98-109; Roos & Reskin, 2002, pp. 235-260).

Today, while mothers are continuing to take shorter employment breaks and staying in paid work more continuously, this has come at a price, where mothers in paid work increasingly have to deal with a double workload (Craig, 2006; Daly, 1996; Hochschild, 1990). In the USA and the UK, for instance, mothers combining paid work and childcare tend to have very long days (Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; McKie, Gregory & Bowlby, 2002, pp. 898-902). Research also suggests that most employed mothers work longer hours per year and for lower pay than fathers (Gerson, 2003; Hertz, 1999, pp. 24-26). This situation is aggravated in the current economic climate of global competition and work intensification, where mothers are increasingly pressured to return to paid work, often without adequate state support and social provision (Crompton, 2006).

However, it must also be noted that labour market inequities affect women in general, not just mothers (<http://www.ers.dol.govt.nz/about/TaskforceReport.pdf>). Workplace gender segregation and persistent gender pay gaps illustrate the unequal positions of men and women in the labour market. On average, even childfree women in continuous, full-time employment have less pay and career prospects than their male counterparts, but more than mothers (Budig, 2002, p. 258; Williams, 2000, pp. 2-4). By contrast, fathers appear more privileged: some research suggests that male managers with stay-at-home wives are paid even more than men/fathers with working wives (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005, p. 78; Thornton, 2005, pp. 81-89).

Internationally, it would appear that men's performance of unpaid work is changing very slowly. Socio-cultural attitudes are entrenched, and real change in wider organisational practices to enable mothers to participate on equal terms with individuals without childcare responsibilities still poses a major challenge (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds & Alldred, 2003; Edwards & Wajcman, 2005). Currently the closing gap in the division of labour is more a result of mothers' greater accommodation by outsourcing unpaid work, for instance, than of men taking on more unpaid work (Baxter, 2002; Benschop, Helsema & Schreurs, 2001; Bittman & Wajcman, 2000, pp. 183-185; Brines, 1994; Fagan & Rubery, 1999; Hesse-Biber &

Carter, 2005, pp. 222-226; Jonung & Persson, 1993; Kroska, 2004; Newell, 1993, pp. 277-287; Shirley & Wallace, 2004, pp. 685-686). Gender and labour market inequities are unlikely to substantially change until mothers receive equal pay and opportunities in paid work (Blair-Loy, 2004; Gerson, 2003; Williams, 2000, p. 127).

However, as indicated in Chapter Three and by the comparative studies of returners' employment position in the three models of welfare state regimes, state policies can do much to initiate change and to ensure stronger employer compliance with equal employment regulation. In Sweden, for instance, the major factor helping mothers to retain high and continuous employment rates is the high level of state support, such as extended and generously paid leave entitlements and public sector infrastructure for childcare and eldercare rather than gender equality (Fagan & Rubery 1999). In the following section I revisit the issue of social policy frameworks, discussed in Chapter Two.

National and international policy frameworks and returners' employment

In the first part of this chapter, I showed that mothers in my survey are constrained by labour market conditions and employers' attitudes, beliefs and practices. However, policies of governments affect the ways employers are permitted to treat women, including returners. They also provide supports (or deterrents) to mothers wishing to return to paid work.

As indicated in Chapter Three, national policy frameworks provide different levels of support to returners, and influence their employment outcomes. Social policies in conservative nations support the breadwinner model of the family and discourage partnered mothers' employment, while those of the social democratic nations provide the most extensive and generous support to employed parents. These countries also have one of the highest rates of mothers' employment. By contrast, in liberal nations like New Zealand where this study took place, mothers are assumed to want part-time work as a lifestyle choice. However, in these countries mothers are also largely left to negotiate returning to employment, with minimum help from the state. As illustrated by the experiences of the mothers in this study, mothers in liberal nations struggle to regain a career after taking career breaks for children.

International organisations such as the ILO can urge members of the United Nations to reduce gender inequities at work. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, even in cases where member nations have ratified international conventions such as CEDAW and ILO 156, research suggests that strict adherence to signatory obligations is not always practised. This too, limits the effectiveness of national and international legislative frameworks, suggesting the need for stronger application of the international legislation, and more effective domestic legislation to protect returners.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the areas of incongruence in the accounts of mothers and employers, and explored the issues with reference to the job and gender queue model explained in Chapter Four. The model shows that in a liberal country such as New Zealand, returners occupy the least preferred occupational position. As suggested in Section One of this thesis, both labour market and social policies and practices have contributed to this. Labour market practices currently assume that mothers would prioritise their families over paid work. In New Zealand, as also in most liberal nations, social policies reinforce such assumptions. Returners are seen as a secondary workforce suitable for low status, generally less skilled work.

In liberal nations, mothers' unequal labour market position is often explained in the language of lifestyle choice. It has been argued that mothers choose to be in part-time jobs in the secondary labour market so as to spend more time with their children (Hakim, 1996, p. 81). To a large extent, the employers in the current study subscribed to this belief, and suggested that their policies and practices did not discriminate against mothers, but rather assisted them into paid work, while also allowing them to fulfil their childcare responsibilities. However, in practice these mothers were offered the least desirable jobs with the least job security and prospects. Employers' relegation of these mothers to the back of the gender queue meant that the only choice they had was one of substandard employment or no employment. These mothers did not choose part-time or casual employment to spend more time with their children, but because such employment was all that was on offer to them. In fact, as Chapters Six to Eight show, the mothers in this study tried very hard to get jobs at the front of the queue. However, various social and economic constraints limited the choices open to them.

Having children is not a lifestyle choice. Society needs children since they are the future workers and taxpayers. At present only women can give birth and breastfeed. And although men can be encouraged to take more responsibility for childcare through policies such as daddy leave, in practice at present, it is predominantly women who continue to take on the main responsibility for childcare. This thesis argues that the current relegation of mothers to the back of the queue can be mitigated by social policy intervention, as evidenced by the more favourable position of returners in social democratic nations as in France. Moreover, changes such as increased leave, including daddy leave, and social provision towards the costs of children are occurring in most industrialised nations. Such changes and the increasingly tight labour market may lead to better employment opportunities for current and future returners. Policy issues will be discussed in the next and final chapter, Chapter Eleven.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis and provides answers to the questions posed in Chapter One. It summarises the study's findings and discusses the opportunities for change based on the conclusions of this research. The chapter emphasises the significance of policy intervention to reduce labour market inequities, and considers some strategies that have been found to be effective in other industrialised nations. Some of these strategies could be adapted to the New Zealand situation.

Study aims and research questions

This study has aimed to explore the paid work experiences of a group of returners in New Zealand by gathering experiential data from a focus group and individual interviews of mothers. This was supplemented by a national mail survey and some in-depth interviews with employers, as well as a study of New Zealand and overseas policy documents.

The questions posed by this study were: What do a group of New Zealand returners identify as barriers to resuming a career? What processes contribute to these returners' location at the back of the job queue? What more could government and employer policies do to assist mothers who take career breaks for children to return to good jobs at the head of the queue? The answers to these questions are summarised in the next section.

Summary of research findings

In the current increasingly tight labour market, mothers who wanted to could return to paid work. However, on average, they returned to jobs with poorer terms and conditions, compared with their previous (pre-children) positions. Regardless of skills and qualifications, all the mothers in this study had suffered occupational downgrading and been relegated to the back of the queue; some mothers had multiple episodes of starting over in re-entry positions. This affected their earning capacity and lifetime incomes.

Further, contrary to choice theory, the mothers in this study were significantly constrained by workplace practices as well as inadequate policy support towards the costs of returning. The employers surveyed for this study appeared to have preconceived ideas about the needs and potentials of returners, and such beliefs influenced the types of jobs that the mothers were offered. Many employers believed that returners wanted or needed part-time employment, and responded to this with offers of flexible but low status jobs at the back of the queue for returners. These mothers then found that they had limited opportunities to progress from such positions to full-time positions usually associated with better employment terms and conditions. Most returners continued in part-time positions and were not fully integrated into the 'normal', full-time workforce even a decade after returning.

In addition, the costs of returning contributed to many mothers delaying re-entry to the labour market. Apart from the costs of childcare, these returners were also affected by the costs of retraining, as well as additional costs associated with job search. These included the cost of printing, getting a work-ready wardrobe, transport and postage. However, unlike the returned ex-servicemen who did receive support to regain civilian careers, the mothers in this study did not get state assistance towards re-entry. On the contrary, both private and state policies and practices appeared to expect mothers to negotiate re-entry on their own.

Finally, while the Working for Families package has increased financial support to low-to-middle-income families where the parents are employed, there is no provision towards retraining and other job-search costs for mothers seeking to return to paid work. Similarly, while the government Choices for Living, Caring and Working plan has a focus on supporting employers to create more flexible work practices to attract and retain skilled workers, there does not appear to be adequate consideration given to the needs of workers with weak bargaining power. Nevertheless, such policy changes are a good start towards better support of workers with caring responsibilities.

Policy implications of the findings

In countries where state intervention in the labour market is wider and social policies provide a fairer and more equitable compensation to mothers, returners are placed higher up the queue. The example of other industrialised nations, in particular the

social democratic nations, suggest that generous and extensive social provision towards the cost of children and better regulation of the labour market can reduce the motherhood penalty and increase the paid work participation of mothers. By contrast, in most liberal nations like New Zealand, a rhetoric of choice allows the state to avoid extensive intervention in the labour market, perpetuating discrimination against mothers.

The labour force participation rates of mothers in New Zealand are currently low compared with many other western industrialised nations. While the New Zealand government is increasing support for families to better balance paid work and family, policy in New Zealand will have to provide more extensive and generous support to returners in order for mothers to have careers and not be forever returning to the back of the queue.

There is scope for more extensive research on New Zealand returners. Currently in New Zealand, there is comparatively little research done on the career trajectory of women returning to work after taking child-related career breaks. In particular, there is a dearth of quantitative research on mothers who take paid or unpaid maternity and parental leave. While such breaks may be shorter, mothers who return to different employment conditions still risk losing out on seniority and pay. There is, for example, employment protection for mothers who take one year of unpaid maternity leave, though in practice any change to the terms and conditions of their employment can affect their career opportunities.

Further, for women who are starting their families in their late thirties, a six-month qualifying period for mothers to get paid parental leave could mean that they would lose eligibility if they wanted to have more than one child close together. Quantitative research would be useful to identify dollar amounts for the costs of child-related career breaks, so that adequate compensations are given to parents who take career breaks for children.

Finally, the employer responses for this study have come mainly from the private sector. Future research could explore mothers' re-entry experiences in the public

sector. The work currently being done on pay and employment equity in the public sector would provide useful information to guide further research in this area.

Opportunities for change

The projected 50-year labour shortages described in Chapter One have pressured governments in most western industrialised nations to increase social provisions to support mothers in paid work (Gauthier, 1998, pp. 192-205). In New Zealand, in the 1990s, while there was increasing pressure to get sole mothers and other individuals on state benefits to return to paid work, there was not much pressure on partnered mothers to return.

Today, however, social policies are increasing pressures on partnered mothers to return to paid work sooner. The Working for Families policy package has increased public spending on the family, including increased provision of childcare, child allowances and child tax credits for working parents. The Government has also increased paid parental leave from 12 weeks to 14 weeks and extended it to the self-employed.

Further, the Government has developed a ten-year plan, the Choices for Living, Caring and Working strategy, which involves different key players, including the government, employers, unions and parents as well as community groups, working together to increase individuals' choices. These strategies include better support for families and assistance to employers to create more family friendly workplaces. In particular, employers are encouraged to listen to parents about their choices for flexible start and end times for paid work, and additional leave to take care of children as and when needed (<http://www.dol.govt.nz/PDFs/Choices-for-Living.pdf>).

In addition, since 1999 when the current Labour-led government took power, the New Zealand job market has continued to become stronger. These changes are likely to improve the employment opportunities of returners. A buoyant labour market and more extensive support for mothers may reduce mothers' occupational downgrading and increase mothers' participation in paid work. This will contribute towards New Zealand's national goals of increasing mothers' labour, eradicating child poverty and empowering mothers (OECD, 2004).

However, much more is needed to ensure that mothers are able to return to good jobs at the head of or further up the queue and resume a career. Although not all returners may aim to have a paid work career (since in practical terms workplace cultures and economic climate are generally hostile to a smooth transition from unpaid to paid work), it is conceivable that they would much rather prefer good jobs further up the queue than be placed at the back of the queue.

Currently global economic trends are putting pressure on employers both in the state and private sectors to casualise their work forces, and women are the workers most severely affected. Mothers returning to the paid workforce are especially badly off, since they occupy the worst position at the back of the queue. As long as workplace practices continue to reward and assume the necessity of long hours and continuity of service, mothers' childcare responsibilities will continue to undermine their labour market opportunities and mothers will be obliged to accept low status jobs at the back of the job queues and gender queues (Lewis & Haas, 2005, p. 360).

For women to get equality at work, men need to take a more equal share of childcare and domestic work. At present women are accommodating by increasing their paid work activities more than men are changing their unpaid work responsibilities (Esping-Andersen, 2002, p. 110; Hartmann, 2004, pp. 228-231; Williams, 2000, pp. 207-241). Nevertheless, state policies can make a difference. Indeed, the slow rate of change in gender relations makes it mandatory for state policies to lead the way in effecting change (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005; Fagan & Rubery, 1999). In order to address the ways that mothers are being placed at the back of the queue, different policy tools similar to those used in social democratic nations, are needed, as the following section indicates.

Equal rights and remuneration for part-timers

In addition to the current initiatives, the New Zealand Government could extend equal rights and remuneration (as available in Sweden, for instance), to returners. Currently, in New Zealand as in most other liberal nations, mothers are confined to part-time, casual and temporary jobs where the pay is low. In most cases, part-timers and casual/temporary workers are excluded from equal rights and remuneration.

Extending equal rights and remuneration for part-timers and other precarious workers would improve mothers' earnings.

Extending pay equity to returners

The current Pay and Employment Equity Review in the state sector could be extended to the private sector. However, while pay equity would reduce the pay gap between men and women to an extent, the low pay of mothers in part-time work would still leave earnings gaps between mothers and non-mothers. This would continue to depress women's average incomes. One way to overcome this is to extend pay equity to returners and other low-waged workers. Research suggests that extending pay equity to employees in such precarious jobs can substantially improve their earnings (Hogue & Kirkpatrick, 2003, pp. 678-685). In addition to this, returners need to have access to better pay.

Better pay for returners: Raising the minimum wage

Research suggests that it is easier to implement policies on minimum wage than policies on pay equity (Dex & Joshi, 1998, p. 19). A high minimum wage would improve the incomes of low paid workers, and since women, in particular mothers of dependent children, are the majority of low paid workers, it has been estimated that raising the minimum wage would have more impact on women's pay than pay equity (Dex & Joshi, 1998; Haveman & Wolfe, 1996, pp. 166-179; Houston, 2005, p. 8; Hyman, 2004; Sunley & Martin, 2003). Further, research suggests that contrary to employers' claims, raising the minimum wage does not necessarily lead to increasing organisational costs to any substantial extent (Sunley & Martin, 2003, pp. 218-222).

While the New Zealand government has continued to increase the minimum wage, there is still a lot of employer resistance to this, and the level is still low compared with most industrialised nations. There is scope for it to be raised further. However, minimum wage needs to be monitored and non-compliance sanctioned with appropriate penalties (Dex & Joshi, 1998, pp. 9-19). Research shows that the gender pay gap could be reduced further if strategies for pay equity were accompanied by stronger legislation (Hyman, 2004; OECD, 2006, pp. 95-99). In social democratic nations such as Sweden, for instance, part-timers have better protection and better pay, making it easier for mothers to achieve economic independence.

Re-entry policies

Re-entry strategies similar to those made available to the re-instatement of war veterans would increase returners' employment in good jobs with good pay and conditions (Ang & Briar, 2002 and 2005; Hodges-Aeberhard, 2001, p. 441; Williams, 2000, p. 207). Some of these strategies included guaranteed access to state-funded training and re-instatement in former jobs.

Research suggests that training increases the potential for upward mobility (OECD, 2006, pp. 102-113). The upward mobility shown by the returners who were able to access state funded return-to-work schemes (currently available only to lone parents) suggests that such schemes should be expanded and extended to returners who are not on a benefit. Returners could be given a grant or allowance that they could use to pay for retraining, and for other job search costs, such as work clothes, postage, and transport to and from training or interview locations. In addition to financial assistance, they could be given access to mentors and other work-related networks currently available to individuals on a state benefit (Kelly, 1991, pp. 159-165).

Reducing paid work hours

The Choices for Living, Caring and Working strategy notes that New Zealand has a long hours culture. This makes it difficult for parents to spend adequate time with children (<http://www.dol.govt.nz/PDFs/Choices-for-Living.pdf>). It also contributes to the relegation of mothers to low status jobs at the back of the queue, as this study found. Shorter working hours for 'standard' full-time workers would enable parents to balance paid and unpaid work better.

Currently, mothers bear the economic and social costs of parenthood. Men, as better-paid workers at the head of the queue, stand to lose more if they have to take career breaks for children: they are understandably reluctant to participate more fully in childcare (Gerson, 2003, pp. 175-176; Williams, 2000). Reducing the maximum hours worked per week would encourage more men to participate more in childcare and domestic work (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg & Kalleberg, 2002, pp. 148-159; Crompton, 2006b, pp. 217-218; Else, 1996, p. 151; Hartmann, 2004, pp. 230-231). The European Union, for example, has set the working week at 48 hours (Bolle,

2001). The Government could set a maximum working week of 40-45 hours for full-time work. However, reduced hours of work should not result in adverse employment outcomes, especially for marginal workers such as returners (Bolle, 2001, p. 237; Fagnani & Letablier, 2004, pp. 551-568).

Closer monitoring of employers' practices

This study has found that employers do not always do, what they say they do and are often proactive in creating ways around legislation. Unless employers' relegation of mothers to the back of the queue is identified as discrimination and legislated against, employers are likely to keep returners in the worst jobs. Closer monitoring of employers' policies and practices would encourage employers to be more transparent, and this may contribute to fairer and less discriminatory work practices (Arthur & Doverspike, 2005, pp. 307-309; OECD, 2006, pp. 12-13; Paetzold, 2005, p. 338).

Closer scrutiny of employers' practices and stricter compliance with regulations (with stronger cost penalties for non-compliance) would encourage employers to address workplace practices that currently disadvantage mothers and other individuals with care responsibilities (Boeri, del Boca & Pissarides, 2005, pp. 103-105). Stronger legislation could oblige employers to take account of the skills that mothers are likely to acquire during their time out of paid work. In this instance, a database listing the skills and competences that returners acquire informally (to be discussed later in this chapter) would be useful to assist employers to identify and reward the skills and competences that mothers bring to the workplace.

There should be a requirement for workplaces to train their interviewers to guard against individual bias in judgement. Further, instead of relying solely on the interview method (as the employers in this study professed to do), employers should be encouraged to use competency-based recruitment and selection procedures, as these have been shown to reduce the discrimination that is associated with formal interviews (Burns, 2000, p. 22). In cases where employers are constrained by cost to use the interview method, they should be required to use structured interview techniques since these have been associated with less bias (Kutcher, de Nicolis, & Brogger, 2004).

For returners who have taken shorter breaks (maternity or unpaid parental leave up to a year), there should be closer scrutiny of the occupational level and working conditions of re-entry appointments. Currently, while there is a legal requirement that employers protect the jobs of mothers on maternity and unpaid parental leave, mothers returning to employment after maternity breaks are likely to be given jobs with fewer career opportunities. Stronger monitoring of the workplace will ensure that mothers can return to the same job terms and conditions.

The current Choices for Living, Caring and Working plan has a focus on providing workers with flexibility. Its emphasis on providing flexibility for all workers will minimise division within the workforce (Booth & Frank, 2005, pp. 21-26; Houston, 2005, p. 8; OECD, 2006, p. 103). However, stronger legislation would ensure that flexibility is genuinely in the interests of workers, and not just about pushing down wages and conditions, as the experiences of the mothers in this study suggest.

Research suggests that legislation to protect part-time workers increases mothers' pay and reduces the motherhood penalty. It also has the added benefit of enabling both parents to be equally involved in parenting (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Hartmann, 2004, pp. 230-231). New Zealand could provide better protection for workers in part-time and other precarious employment. Short hours (less than 20 hours per week) and casual hours (such as call centre) jobs could come under closer scrutiny to ensure that employees in such jobs are not exploited.

This is already happening in some parts of the world. In the USA, the American 1994 Contingent Workforce Equity Act provides protection to low status workers (Williams, 2000, p. 274). And in the EU (where there are stricter regulations to ensure the rights of part-time employees), the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations, (2000), oblige employers to provide pay and conditions to part-time workers on a pro rata basis. In the UK (following EU legislation), stronger legislation to protect the rights of part-time workers has improved the labour market terms and conditions of part-timers.

The Dutch Act on Flexibility and Security and the Act on Equal Treatment of Part-time Workers have also increased protection for part-time and casual employees

(Burri, 2006, pp. 316-327; Schmid, 2002, p. 76). However, while Dutch mothers are able to switch from full-time to part-time jobs and vice-versa as their situations change (Boeri et al., 2005, p. 107), Dutch mothers are also more conservative and Dutch policies still largely support the breadwinner model of the family, as discussed in Chapter Two. Nevertheless, the Dutch Working Time Act (2003) requiring employers to take account of employees' personal circumstances (Burri, 2006, pp. 317-327) would provide some protection for women who want to return to jobs with career opportunities.

New Zealand could ratify the Convention on Part-time Work, 1994, so that returners in part-time employment have access to a range of employment rights and conditions currently available mostly to full-time workers. It could also speed up the planning and implementation of the ILO Decent Work Agenda, 1999 (currently only in the initial planning stage), which would provide more protection for those in precarious employment. This would provide returners in part-time, casual, and temporary employment with the same rights and protection as full-time workers.

The New Zealand government should also strengthen its commitment to fulfil its obligations to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of age and gender, as mandated by ILO Convention 100 (Equal Remuneration) and Convention 111 (Discrimination on Employment and Occupation), which it has ratified. In addition, it could ratify Convention 156, which prohibits discrimination against parenthood.

However, while stronger legislation would provide regulation to guard against discriminatory practices in the labour market, other measures are also needed to reduce the pay gaps between mothers and non-mothers. In particular, there should be more support for mothers generally.

Support for mothers

Since mothers are significantly more likely to take career breaks for children, social provision should be targeted at increasing mothers' attachment to paid work without this incurring further disadvantages by increasing the total hours of paid and unpaid work for mothers. As discussed in Chapter Three, extensive and generous support for mothers in paid work in such places as the social democratic nations and France have

increased mothers' paid work participation as well as fertility rates in these countries (del Boca & Pasqua, 2005, pp. 131-133). These policies could be added to current New Zealand policies to make it easier for mothers to combine paid work and childcare.

Extending paid parental, sick and other leave

Currently the New Zealand Paid Parental Leave of 14 weeks is less generous than the OECD average of 26 weeks (OECD, 2006, p. 130). Mothers need the fourteen weeks to establish breast-feeding and to recover from the birth, and would not be encouraged to share the leave with fathers. Paid leave could be extended to a year, compensated at a rate that replaces the mother's loss in income (at present, payment of paid parental leave only covers half of the mother's earnings).

The current legislation to protect the job of mothers on maternity and parental leave could be extended from one year to two or three years, as is possible in most EU countries. This would ensure that mothers are not penalised by having to return to the back of the queue. In addition, the current two weeks of unpaid daddy leave could be extended and paid at a rate sufficient to compensate fathers who take up such leave. Such leave, routinely available to fathers in social democratic nations, has been shown to increase fathers' involvement in childcare and to contribute to better sharing of unpaid work in the home (Crittenden, 2001, p. 243; Daune-Richard, 2000, p. 8; Morehead, 2005, p. 9). In countries such as Sweden, where fathers are encouraged to take leave, around 40 percent of fathers do so (Daune-Richard, 2000).

The Choices for Living, Caring and Working plan provides protection for mothers' jobs for up to one year in order to facilitate mothers' breastfeeding requirements. In addition to this, the government should support workplaces to provide breastfeeding facilities for mothers by providing a quiet room for milk extraction, for instance. Workplaces could also provide mothers with shorter or flexible hours of work to fit in with breastfeeding needs. Such provisions are routinely available in Austria and have contributed to more mothers staying on in paid work (Haataja, 2000).

This study suggests that mothers felt stressed by not having sufficient leave such as sick leave (currently only five days) to take care of children or to attend school-related

activities. There is a strong case for New Zealand to follow the example of social democratic nations by providing a generous amount of sick leave (currently 60 days) to take care of sick children and other dependents. In addition, since parents often have to attend special school events, including parent-teacher interviews, and to be home with children when there are teacher-only days, state legislated leave for such days would ensure mothers (and other carers) are able to attend such days without being penalised for doing so.

Childcare and tax allowances

Childcare costs, especially for small children, are a significant factor in keeping women out of the paid work force longer than they would otherwise choose. Reducing the costs of childcare through public provision or state subsidies aimed at reducing market price is especially important. In liberal countries where the METRs are high, increasing childcare subsidies have been found to be most effective at reducing childcare costs (OECD, 2006, p. 130).

Reducing the price of childcare can effectively increase the paid work participation rates of mothers. A European study of first time mothers, for instance, found that mothers' return to paid work increased by as much as 10 percent when childcare subsidies were increased (Gustafsson, Kenjoh & Wetzels, 2002, pp. 186-197). In the USA, the effect was more for low income mothers, where estimates suggest that lowering the price of childcare by 10 percent increases mothers' paid work participation by 2 percent in general, and by 4 percent for mothers with less education (Karoly & Panis, 20004, p. 65). While childcare quality in the USA is often of poor standard, the emphasis on quality set out in the Working for Families package will increase the number of quality childcare places in New Zealand. However, increased quality will increase childcare costs, so that state subsidies in terms of financial or tax allowances for children will have to increase to make quality childcare affordable for low income mothers.

There could also be changes in the tax system to reduce income tax penalties accruing to mothers who hold multiple jobs. Currently, multiple jobholders are taxed at a higher rate in subsequent jobs. This reduces the take-home pay of returners and defeats mothers' goals of achieving a higher income. Abolishing the penalty rate for

subsequent jobs would increase the income of returners who have to hold multiple jobs in order to achieve a level of economic independence. Further, a tax system that treats a series of part-time job as one full-time equivalent job, as is possible in places like Germany and France, would also increase the take-home pay for returners who hold multiple jobs (Schmid, 2002, p. 76).

Government funded dissemination of information about returners' labour

Current government campaigns to increase public awareness about issues such as vehicle accidents, violence against women, bird flu and natural disasters suggest that policy makers already acknowledge the significant role that such advertisements play in educating the public. The Choices for Living, Caring and Working plan, for instance, aims to provide research information to employers about workers' needs for better balance between paid work and other activities. Providing relevant and up-to-date information to employers will assist employers to make workplaces more family friendly. The mothers in this study have also identified other kinds of information that the government can disseminate to employers.

Participants suggested that the government could run a campaign to value motherhood and care work by highlighting the skills and competencies of mothers similar to the 'girls can do anything' campaign. (However, this is not the same as creating an image that says, "mothers can do everything", as this would increase mothers' workload even more). To do this, it could collect a database of accurate information about the types of non-paid work that mothers participate in while on child-related career breaks. This could list the skills and competences that mothers collectively acquire from such tasks. Such a database would provide employers with added information about the skills that returners bring to the workplace. Returners could also use the information to create a portfolio of work-related skills to account for the 'blanks' in their *curricula vitae*.

The Government could provide human resources personnel and recruitment agents with information on the benefits of employing returners. This would contribute to reducing employers' perception that career breaks inevitably lead to loss of skills and competences. Further, the Government could provide information packages to school teachers and counsellors, so that students are made aware that the choices they make

now will have implications for their future career and lifetime income. The current collaborative research being done by the various government department and community groups is important to ensure that research findings reflect the real situations of families, as they try to balance paid and unpaid work. However, in addition to such research, there should be more research done on the career trajectories of returners. Other joint ventures are also possible.

Joint ventures

Currently most New Zealand women work in organisations employing 50 or fewer employees, as reflected in the sample responses to the employer survey in this study. Most of these work sites are too small to have childcare facilities, and very few workplaces provide on-site childcare facilities. In view of the increasing number of mothers with young children in the workplace, employers could invest in on-site childcare facilities or credits to buy such services at other places. In this respect, employers and the Government could work together to provide better support for working mothers.

For instance, after-school care facilities could be set up in schools around the country. Since schools are already set up for children and their needs, the set up costs associated with this venture would be minimal. The Government could provide employers with school premises at reduced charges (for maintenance, for instance) and employers could provide childcare minders so that the costs to parents of using such centres would be less.

There could also be joint governance of training funds and more collaborative ventures to increase returners' access to career type jobs. Employers (with some assistance from the government) could provide vocational and second chance education for returners. For example, they could provide short courses for returners, as well as specific courses to access male-dominated occupations. A scheme similar to that offered for skilled immigrants could be created for returners. This would provide returners with a 'foot-in-the door' and widen their work-related networks.

In addition, research suggests that mothers who have on-going links with their employers when on maternity leave have better incentives to return to the same

employer. In this study, returners, especially in teaching and banking, have found it easier to return when they have informal contacts with past employers or through friends or relatives in contact with hiring organisations. Some employers already have ways of keeping in touch with mothers on parental or maternity leave, such as offers of relieving work, including mothers on maternity leave in staff functions and generally keeping mothers on a career break informed and connected through regular email or newsletters. However, such strategies are often sporadic and not generally available to all returners. Some government subsidies towards the costs of such programmes would encourage more employers to investigate and implement such programmes.

Research also suggests that the business case for employer funded-family friendly practices is strong (Dex & Scheibl, 2002; Haas, 2004). Mothers in this study further suggest that employers who are able to assist mothers by providing a child-friendly work environment benefit from the increased loyalty, commitment and goodwill of mothers. Some ways of encouraging employers to aim at being the employer of choice has been done by the EEO Trust through their Employer of Choice competition (EEO Trust, 1998). Employers identified as the one providing the most family friendly workplace, for instance, can use the award as a marketing tool to attract the best workers (<http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/content/docs/newsletters/eeo-trust-news-may-2003.pdf>). More state subsidies to fund such ventures would increase mothers' employment opportunities.

Unions and mothers' roles

This study highlights returners' weak bargaining power. Returners and unions can work together to reduce this disadvantage. Research suggests that collective bargaining is more effective than individual efforts (Bolle, 2001, p. 234; Cullen, Kordey, Schmidt & Gaboardi, 2003). Unions are more likely to address issues affecting women than are employers, and returners can use collective union power to negotiate for better working conditions and terms.

Recent union successes for groups such as nurses and café workers (Restaurant Brands) are indicative of the strength of union backing for low status workers. Trade unions could do much more to improve the working conditions of returners, but for

this to happen, more returners need to join unions and lobby for union representation. While this sounds like a simple action, in practice, the predominance of returners in smaller work places (with lower union representation) and precarious employment (where low and irregular pay makes union membership costly) means that returners are less likely to join a trade union. There is a need for trade unions to be more proactive in support of returners (Tomlinson, 2005) and to increase mothers' membership. One way of doing this is for unions to make union fees more affordable to low income earners.

In addition, mothers themselves could lobby the government for policies to address workplace practices that currently discriminate against returners. In the UK returners' groups provide support and information for returners. New Zealand returners could also work together to increase pressure on the government to increase assistance to mothers returning to paid work.

Returners should also plan their employment breaks with a view to re-entry without incurring heavy penalties. Before leaving the paid workforce, they should research the potential to participate in programs that can maintain their links with the workplace. They should make full use of the various entitlements available to parents and ensure that employers are not only aware of their obligations but also ready to implement policies to help parents to combine paid work and childcare.

Some returners suggested maintaining a link to paid work by being self-employed. However, this is easier for returners in such vocations such as hairdressing, accounting or retail occupations, where clients will move with the service provider, than for returners with less transferable skills. Being self-employed while the children are young would ensure that there are no blank spaces in the *curricula vitae*, though careful planning is needed to make sure that the spillover from paid work to home and vice versa are strictly controlled.

Concluding comments

This thesis began with a quote in regard to the importance of women's role as mothers. In it, the author, Tizard, compares the situation of returning ex-servicemen with that of mothers returning to the paid workforce, suggesting that both groups of

workers are potentially disadvantaged by the time taken out of paid work. The contribution of mothers bearing and rearing children is at least as great as that of soldiers. Tizard argues that just as state policies at that time adapted to address the disadvantages facing ex-servicemen, so should policies now be adapted to assist mothers to return to good jobs, so that mothers are not penalised by having and looking after children.

This thesis uses the same line of argument. In contrast with the treatment of ex-servicemen, parents returning to paid work (unless they are on a benefit, in which case they receive only minimal assistance) are largely neglected by the state. This neglect is not simply an accidental oversight. The experience of the mobilisation and demobilisation of personnel during and after the two World Wars illustrates how far the state can intervene when it is deemed appropriate. Planning and care went into avoiding a situation where ex-services personnel would suffer loss of status or economic well-being as a result of making their contribution to the nation. Following Pateman (1988), this thesis argues that the social contract between individuals and the state is so deeply gendered that it should be more appropriately called a sexual contract. There seems to have been a different kind of understanding and expectation, with fighting men, compared with women returning to employment after child-related career breaks. This contributes to the feminisation of poverty and reduces women's status, confidence and expectations, whilst in relative terms also raising men's. While the returners in this study expected to have to negotiate paid work (finding a job or training), demobilised ex-servicemen expected the state to provide help to them as a right, not a privilege (Kizito, 1969).

Both mothers and ex-servicemen are prepared to make sacrifices. However, it appears that the men receive compensation in terms of policies to ease their re-entry to a satisfactory position in civilian employment, whereas the women do not. It may be argued that society is exploiting mothers by not offering similar rewards for essential services to the nation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1a: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Greet, thank, explain study, obtain consent to participate

What made you interested to participate in this focus group?

Reasons for returning to paid work (reasons for taking career break)

Preparation if any, to return to paid work

Previous paid work experience – returned to same position?

Experience of returning to paid work – e.g. job seeking/interviews

Employer's recognition/awareness of skills acquired while out of paid work

Career prospects/job security/paid work terms and conditions

Comment on effect of employment break on career/job

Hours of paid work –actual/preferred

Comment on role of government/employers if any

Recommendations for mothers considering taking employment breaks

Any other comments

APPENDIX 1b: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Which of the following age group do you fit into?
30-34 35-39 40-44 45-49 50plus
2. How many children do you have?
3. What is the age of your youngest child?
4. Were you in paid work before you had your first child?
5. If yes, how long did you work?
6. What position/level of job did you hold?
7. What factors contributed to your stopping work?

Do you have the following qualification?

- Tertiary qualifications (please state degree)
- Bursary/post secondary school qualifications (please state subjects)
- School certificate (please state subjects)
- Voluntary work experiences (please state types)

APPENDIX 2a: COPY OF ADVERTISEMENT

Copy of advertisement placed in the *Manawatu Evening Standard*, *the Tribune*, *the Guardian* and the *Horowhenua Mail*.

Calling women who are thinking of or have recently joined the paid workforce....

I am a mature woman who is conducting a research on the experiences of mothers who having completed their families are thinking of re-entering or have recently re-entered the paid work force. I am looking for interested women to participate in the research.

Participation will involve an interview of 45 minutes to an hour. All information gathered will be treated with full confidentiality.

If you are interested to share your experiences, please call me on: (06) 355 5799 extension 2913 or through my supervisors on: Dr. C Briar: ext: 2815 or Dr J Quinnell: ext: 2829.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 01/107.

APPENDIX 2b: INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Career break or broken career? Mothers' experiences of returning to paid work.

My name is Ee Kheng Ang. I am currently working part-time as a senior tutor at Massey University and a teacher of Japanese at Carnot Independent School for Girls. This research is intended as a partial fulfilment of my PhD thesis in the School of Sociology, Social Work and Social Policy at Massey University, Palmerston North.

My supervisors are:

Dr. Celia Briar (chief): Tel: (06) 350 5799 ext.2815; **C.J.Briar@massey.ac.nz**

Dr. Jocelyn Quinnell: Tel: (06) 350 5799 ext. 2829; **J.Y.Quinnell@massey.ac.nz**

Both supervisors work in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social work at Massey University, Turitea Campus, Palmerston North.

I can be contacted either through phoning my supervisors or through my work number: (06) 350 5799 ext. 2913; **E.K.Ang@massey.ac.nz**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 01/105.

Purpose of the study:

This research aims to investigate the factors which influence the return to paid work of women who have taken time out to care for children. It will examine the work preparedness of mothers and the practices of employers. As well it will consider policies that may impede or facilitate these women's search for paid work. It is hoped that the study will highlight areas that all three parties may wish to further develop in order to facilitate and widen the choices available to mothers who seek to return to the work force.

Method by which your name was obtained

Your name was selected from a group of women who responded to the advertisement that I placed in the *Evening Standard, Tribune, Guardian* and the *Horowhenua Mail*.

Nature and duration of participant's involvement.

Participation is on a voluntary basis. Should you decide to participate in this research, you will be invited to take part in an interview of 45 minutes to an hour. Follow-up interviews may be needed but this will only occur with your consent and at a time and place convenient to you.

Use of data collected

The information gathered will form part of my PhD thesis. As well, relevant material may be used in academic publication or journals. Results from the survey may be disseminated to policy makers, community groups and the media.

With your consent interviews will be taped. All information gathered will be treated as strictly confidential. I will be the only person who has access to raw data, including audiotapes, notes and transcript materials. All information and material generated by the research will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure location.

Pseudonyms only will be used in the analysis of interview material. Any identifying features will be removed from the final thesis. Audiotapes will be labelled using code names only.

I will transcribe all tapes myself.

I undertake to destroy all tapes, transcripts and drafts approximately three months after the completion of the thesis. Should you so request tapes and transcripts will be returned to you to be disposed of at your discretion.

Confidentiality and anonymity

This interview will be conducted in private at a place designated by you.

All potentially identifying material such as names, personal details and geographic locations will be removed or altered at the time of transcribing the interviews. Pseudonyms only will be used. All tapes and transcripts will be coded.

Information that could possibly identify you will not be used in the final writing. Only the researcher will know your identity.

I will be the only person who has access to the audiotapes, transcripts, notes and all other raw data generated by the research. Such data will be stored in a locked cabinet at a secure location.

I will transcribe the materials myself and will not share the information obtained with any other person without your consent.

As the data I collect will be gathered from interviews, I cannot promise anonymity.

As your interview will be recorded, you should be aware that I am not able to guarantee absolute confidentiality. However, I can assure you that all precautions as outlined above will be taken to encourage maximum confidentiality.

All raw data, taped interviews and draft copies will be destroyed three months after the completion of the thesis.

Participant's rights

If you agree to take part in the study, you have the following rights:

The right to decline to participate.

The right to refuse to answer any particular questions.

The right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The right to ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.

The right to halt the interview at any time.

The right to agree or disagree to the interview being taped.

The right to turn off the tape recorder at anytime.

The right to amend the content of the transcripts of the interview. The right to eliminate from the transcript any portion, which you do not want to be used.

The right to determine the disposal of tapes, drafts, and notes taken during the interview.

The right to provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;

The right to a summary of the findings of the study when it is concluded.

Should you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me through either of my supervisors or directly through my work number (06) 350 5799 ext: 2913.

Thank you for your assistance. Your time is valuable and the researcher gratefully acknowledges you freely giving up your time to aid this study.

APPENDIX 2c: CONSENT FORM

Career break or broken career? Mothers' experiences of returning to paid work.

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I further understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. I understand that the information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.

I also understand that I have the right to request the tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree/ do not agree to the interview being taped. (Please circle one).

I agree/ do not agree to my name being used. (Please circle one).

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed:(Participant)

Name:

Date:

Signed:(Researcher)

Name:

Date:

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 01/107.

APPENDIX 3a: INTERVIEW GUIDE (EMPLOYERS)

Greet and thank participant; explain study, and obtain consent

Topics to be covered:

Employment: mothers returning to paid work? Many/ often/rarely/never?

Biggest challenge to employing mothers (of dependent children/ returning to work)

Type of jobs offered –why

Terms of employment – pay/ hours of work/ what capacity?

Assistance to mothers

Views on childcare, paid parental leave

Most commonly used recruitment/selection methods

Contact with mothers on career break? How?

APPENDIX 3b: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In order for me to be sure that I have a representative sample, I need a few details about you.

Please tick as applies.

44. Please indicate your age:
- 20-29
 - 30-39
 - 40-49
 - 50-59
 - 60 and above

45. Are you:
- Male
 - Female

- Please indicate your position:
- Chief executive officer
 - Director
 - Manager (please indicate level)
 - Supervisor
 - Other (please indicate title) _____

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX 4a: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

It is assumed that completing this questionnaire implies consent. You have the right to decline to answer any specific questions in the questionnaire.

Section I: Company Profile

For questions 1 and 2 please tick the one best response.

1. Which one of the following best describes your organisation?

- Private company
- State owned enterprise (SOE)
- Voluntary organisation
- Public listed company
- Other (Please specify) _____

2. Which of the following New Zealand Standard Industrial Classifications best describes your organisation?

- Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry, Fishing
- Mining and Quarrying
- Manufacturing
- Electricity, Gas and Water
- Building and Construction
- Wholesale and Retail Trade, etc.
- Transport, Storage and Communication
- Business and Financial Services
- Community, Social and Personal Services

For questions 3 and 4 please write the number of staff in the relevant boxes.

3. How many staff does your company employ?

	Full-time (females)
	Full time (males)
	Part-time (females)
	Part-time (males)
	Causal (females)
	Casual (males)

4. How many of your staff are:

	Women
	Men

Section II: General Perception

In questions 5 to 19, please tick one box that best represents your opinion.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
The biggest challenge in employing a mother returning to paid work is (questions 5 to 11):						
5 The cost of providing training or refresher courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Her inability to work full time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Her lack of job relevant skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Her qualifications are no longer relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 Her lack of confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Her age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 Her lack of commitment to the workplace	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
Childcare expenses should be (questions 12 to 16):						
12 The total responsibility of the individual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13 Partially funded by the government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 Fully funded by the government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 Partially funded by the employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 Fully funded by the employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
Paid Parental Leave should be (questions 17 to 19):						
17 The total responsibility of the government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 The total responsibility of the employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19 A shared expense of the government and the employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In questions 20 to 27, please tick one box that best represents your opinion.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
The best way to encourage a mother to return to the workforce is to (questions 20 to 23):						
20 Offer flexible hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21 Offer casual hours of work that fit in with childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22 Offer short-term employment contracts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23 Offer a lower rate of pay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The following statements are accurate representations about mothers returning to paid work (questions 24-27):						
24 Mothers are not fully responsible for the family income so they are happy to work non-standard hours at a lower pay rate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25 It is easier to re-employ a mother who returns to paid work after a year of absence than one who returns after 2 or more years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26 In general it makes better economic sense to employ a school leaver over a mother returning to paid work	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
27 Mothers who have voluntary work experience are more employable than those without	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section III: Recruitment

For question 28 please tick the most common type that applies.

28. How do you obtain candidates?

Informally through networks such as:

- Partners Business associates
Relatives Other (please specify)
Friends

Formally through:

- Media advertisements Private recruitment agencies
New Zealand Employment Services Company (internal) job websites

For questions 29 –31, please tick all that apply.

29. In your job advertisements, which of the following work schedules would your organisation offer?

- Job share (this is where two or more people share a full time position)
 Part-time, temporary
 Part-time work, permanent
 Work from home

- Overtime work
- Hours of work between 9am and 3pm
- Hours of work before 9am
- Hours of work after 5pm
- Other (please specify) _____

30. Which of the following opportunities would you list in your advertisements?

- Opportunities to do refresher courses
- Opportunities for training
- Opportunities to work part-time
- Opportunities to work within school hours
- Opportunities to work only during school terms
- Other (please specify) _____

31. Which of the following characteristics would you list in a job description for a potential employee?

- Ability to learn new skills
- Ability to work with people of all ages
- Ability to prioritise tasks
- Ability to attend to more than one task at a time
- Ability to take initiative
- Ability to work without close supervision
- Ability to be a good listener
- Ability to be a team player
- Ability to fit into the organisational culture of the company
- Other (please specify) _____

Section IV: Selection and Induction

For questions 32 please **tick all that apply**.

32. Which of the following skills would you look for in a potential employee?

- Budgeting skills
- Organisational skills
- Communication skills
- Technical skills
- Critical thinking skills
- Work processing skills
- Job relevant skills
- Other (please specify) _____

For questions 33-37, please **tick the one best response**:

33. Are candidates for jobs given a formal interview?

- Yes (100% of the time) Yes (occasionally)
- No (Please go to question 35)

34. Are interviewers in your organisation:

- Highly trained
- Trained

- Not trained but experienced
- Not trained

Section V: Mothers returning to paid work

35. Do mothers who have taken leave for maternity and child rearing return to your organisation?

- Yes
- No

If your answer is no, please go question 40

36. If yes, do they return to the same job?

- Yes, full time
- Yes, part-time
- No, they return to a different job (please give an example) _____

37. Do you regard mothers returning to paid employment as in need of training?

- Training not seen as necessary
- Training offered as part of on-going staff development
- Training offered individually as needed

For questions 38 - 39, please tick all that apply.

38. When training is offered, this is usually done in the following ways.

- Training offered during hours which fit in with their work times
- Training offered during weekends
- Training offered between 9am and 6pm
- Training offered using a supervisor or mentor to monitor and assist with progress
- Training offered using a work buddy to re-orient mothers to work procedures etc.

39. Mothers returning to the workforce are generally:

- Given information about career steps or progress
- Given information about childcare
- Given information about opportunities for using flexible time
- Given information about sick leave
- Given information about other types of leave
- Given information on other entitlements (please give examples) _____

40. Does your organisation have ways of encouraging mothers to return to your employment?

- Yes
- No (Please go to question 44)

For question 41 please tick all that apply.

41. If yes, how do you do this?

- Newsletters
- Invitations to attend meeting
- Invitations to participate in staff functions
- Invitation to visit workplace on an informal basis
- Given opportunities to work in a relieving position
- Staff club membership
- Post cards
- Email

- Access to organisational web sites
- Other (please specify) _____

For question 42, please **tick all that apply**.

42. In your experience, women returners:

- Are reliable
- Are competent
- Are willing to put in extra efforts to get the job done
- Are able to learn job relevant skills
- Are able to show initiative
- Are focused on the task
- Have job relevant skills
- Are difficult to train
- Do not fit into the company culture
- Lack confidence
- Lack drive
- Are not interested in promotions
- Not interested in more hours of work
- Are too old to learn new skills
- Are too slow to learn new skills
- Are unable to cope in crisis situations
- Have other non-work commitment that affects their commitment to work
- Other (please specify) _____

43. On the whole would you say your experience of employing mothers returning to the workforce was?

- Positive
- Negative

If you would like to give examples that illustrate your choice above, do so in the space below

Section VI: Background Information

In order for me to be sure that I have a representative sample, I need a few details about yourself.

Please tick as applies.

44. Please indicate your age:
- 20-29
 - 30-39
 - 40-49
 - 50-59
 - 60 and above
45. Are you:
- Male
 - Female
46. Are you in the:
- Manawatu, North Island
 - Other North Island
 - South Island

47. Please indicate your position:

- Chief executive officer
- Director
- Manager (please indicate level) _____
- Supervisor
- Other (please indicate title) _____

48. How long has your company been in business? _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Please return it in the reply paid envelope by ...

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 01/107. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz

.....

This section will be separated from your questionnaire once it is returned to ensure that your responses remain confidential.

If you wish to receive a summary of the findings from this survey please fill out the details below:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone No: _____

Email: _____

If you wish to discuss the findings please tick here: _____

APPENDIX 4b: COVER LETTER TO EMPLOYERS

Dear Sir/Madam

I am undertaking a research project as part of a PhD degree in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work at Massey University, Palmerston North. My name is Ee Kheng Ang.

My research topic is on mothers returning to the workforce. As well as conducting face-to-face interviews, in order to include as many employers as possible, I am also conducting a mail survey. The survey seeks to explore employers' perceptions of mothers returning to paid work.

This survey is being mailed randomly to organizations listed in the *New Zealand Business Who's Who* (2003), the Yellow Pages of *The Telephone Book* (2003/04) and *AA Accommodation Guide* (2004).

I would like to invite you to participate in this research by completing the enclosed questionnaire. It is estimated that the questionnaire will take 25-30 minutes to complete.

I understand that the information you supply may be sensitive. Therefore the survey has been designed in such a way that no individual response will be identified. Aggregated responses only will be used in the analysis. As a student of Massey University, I have an agreement with the Massey Human Ethics Committee to ensure that all raw data will be kept strictly confidential. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to raw data.

You will notice that there are matching numbers on the questionnaire and reply envelope. These are to help me identify non-replies so that I do not send reminders to participants who have already responded to the questionnaire. Once that is done, the envelope will be discarded to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of response.

As this is only a small survey, your response is very important. Your response will add to the validity of the survey.

As a participant you have the right to:

- Decline to participate
- Refuse to answer any questions in the survey
- Withdraw from the study before **31 March 2004**
- Ask questions about the survey
- Provide information on the understanding that you or your organisation will not be identified

If you require further information please feel free to contact me on (06) 355 2725 or by postal or email address as given below.

Please return your completed questionnaire in the reply paid envelope by March 31 2004.

I appreciate the time you have given to complete this survey. If you would like a summary of the research findings or would like a chance to discuss the results, please fill in the details at the end of the questionnaire.

Yours sincerely

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 01/107. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz.

APPENDIX 4c: REMINDER LETTER TO EMPLOYERS

Dear Sir/Madam

A few weeks ago I sent you a questionnaire on Mothers Returning to the labour force. I am writing to let you know that although the return date is now passed, I will still accept and process late responses.

Your response will increase the validity of the survey and give a clearer picture of what employers think. Please make your opinions count.

If you have not yet returned your questionnaire, I would greatly appreciate you doing so as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

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