

Research on **Crisis Pregnancy, Parenting and Employment Policy**

For employers, employees, policy makers, HR managers and representative bodies.

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What is this research summary about?

This research summary is part of a larger Crisis Pregnancy Agency initiative that aims to bring research findings into policy development and professional practice. This leaflet is aimed at employers, employees, policy makers, HR managers and representative groups involved in the development and implementation of work-life balance or family friendly policies.

In an increasingly competitive market, employers now recognise the value of greater flexibility in employment practices to improve staff morale, retention and commitment and to allow the organisation respond more flexibly to changing market demands.

Work-life balance policies are usually designed to help workers combine employment with family and personal commitments. Our research strongly suggests that when women are faced with a crisis pregnancy situation their decisions about whether or not to continue with the pregnancy and whether or not to continue in work if they decide to become parents are influenced by workplace policy and culture.

This summary seeks to bring together research to describe the link between crisis pregnancy and workplace policy and to examine the impact of workplace culture, work-life balance policies and maternity issues on working women's decisions to become a parent.

The information in this summary has been taken from a number of sources. Research findings from research reports commissioned by the Agency have been used, together with data from from the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP), the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Equality Authority, the European Commission and UNICEF. Further information about these sources can be found on the last page of this leaflet.

What Does the Research Tell Us?

- Crisis pregnancy affects women of childbearing age regardless of marital status. 28% of women and 23% of men who had experience of pregnancy said they had experienced a crisis pregnancy (CPA report no. 7).
- The mean age for the occurrence of crisis pregnancy is 23 for women and 24 for men (CPA report no. 7).
- The number of women in the work-force has risen dramatically in the past twenty years. Between 1981 and 2005, female labour participation in Ireland grew by 23%. In 2006, 78.5% of women in the 25-34 age category were in employment (CSO, 2006).
- Research consistently shows that employment and career opportunities form part of the decision making process when a crisis pregnancy occurs (CPA report no. 16; CPA report no. 6; Mahon et al., 1998).
- For women who choose abortion, career, education, childcare and financial concerns are often mentioned as factors effecting their decision (CPA report no. 16; CPA report no. 6; Mahon et al., 1998).
- Women report that issues surrounding childcare and its affordability are critical to women experiencing crisis pregnancy, especially those women who may be facing lone parenthood (CPA report no. 16; CPA report no. 6; Mahon et al., 1998).
- While issues such as career progression, job opportunities and childcare affect all parents, both mothers and fathers, research shows that they are of particular concern for women and men affected by crisis pregnancy and can influence the decision to become a parent (CPA report no. 16).
- Women's increased participation in the work-force is critical to future economic development and policies need to be put in place to enable women to stay in the work-force where they decide to continue with an unplanned pregnancy (CPA report no. 16; NCPP, 2005).

Profile of Crisis Pregnancy

What is a Crisis Pregnancy?

It is a pregnancy that is neither desired by nor planned by the woman involved and which represents a personal crisis for her.

- Research reports that the most common reason for defining a pregnancy as a crisis is that it is unplanned. 41% of women and 39% of men who had experienced crisis pregnancies provided this as a reason (CPA report no. 7).
- The vast majority of crisis pregnancies are defined as such because they occur at a time in a woman's life when conditions are not appropriate or a pregnancy will restrict her future opportunities (Irish Survey of Sexual Health and Relationships (ISSHR)).
- Crisis pregnancy is most likely to coincide with the age at which most women enter a critical phase in employment experience or career.

Who Experiences Crisis Pregnancy?

There is a common belief that crisis pregnancy is a teenage problem or experienced by single women and men. However, crisis pregnancy affects women and men into their twenties, thirties and forties regardless of marital status (ISSHR).

- Of a sample of 3,317 respondents between the ages of 18 and 45, 28% of women who had been pregnant and 23% of men said they had experienced a crisis pregnancy (CPA report no. 7).
- 65% were in a steady relationship, married or engaged at the time the crisis pregnancy occurred (CPA report no. 7).
- The mean age for the occurrence of crisis pregnancy is 23 for women and 24 for men (CPA report no. 7). The ISSHR survey suggests that the average age of crisis pregnancy may be dropping (ISSHR).
- The majority of crisis pregnancies result in birth (75%) (CPA report no. 7).

Growth of Female Labour Force and Family Formation

One of the greatest changes in Ireland in recent years has been the increased number of women in employment. Part-time employment in particular has fuelled the increase in women's participation in the labour force.

- In 1981, female labour participation was just under 30%; by 2006 it had risen to 53% (CPA report no. 16: CSO, 2006).
- In 2006 there was 78.5% participation in the labour force by women in the 25 –34 year category (CSO, 2006).
- 62% of women adjusted their working patterns on becoming a parent, in comparison to 27% of men (OECD, 2003).
- There are three times more women than men working in part-time employment. Between December 2006 and February 2007, 278,300 females - compared to 78,100 males - were in part-time employment (CSO, 2007).
- The rate of employment of women between the ages of 20 and 49 falls by 15 points when they have a child, while that of men increases by six points (European Commission, 2007).
- Results from the national census 2006 show that the level of male employment in the 25-34 and 35-44 age categories increases slightly from 94.1% to 94.2%, whereas female participation in the same age categories drops by 11.8% from 81% to 69.2% participation (CSO, 2006).
- OECD findings show that it is common for individuals not to become parents at all or to limit family size due to the perception that parenting is not compatible with working life (OECD, 2003).

"I'm progressing my career all the time at the moment and since I left college it's been a steep enough curve and it will continue for another few years. But in another few years, if I want to have a baby it'll just change. It's just different; it's unequal between guys and women..."

CPA report no. 6

Crisis Pregnancy Decision Making and the Workplace

Notwithstanding growth in the female labour force, women continue to face difficulties when faced with a crisis pregnancy. Research has found that workplace policies and practices can have a direct impact on crisis pregnancy outcomes.

The Decision To Have An Abortion

The Irish Contraception and Crisis Pregnancy Study (ICCP) reported that 15% of women who experienced a crisis pregnancy chose abortion (CPA report no. 7). We know from several studies that women tend to assess if having children will have a detrimental effect on their career. Research conducted on women who had an abortion reported that job or career issues strongly influenced their decisions not to become parents (CPA report no. 16; Mahon et al., 1998). Findings suggest some women are concerned about coping with lone-parenthood and others believe they would be unable to cope with a child in their current career, education or employment circumstances. Younger women, in particular, feel that it is impossible to balance a family and a career with a dominant concern having sufficient time to devote to both work and family life (CPA report no. 16).

Research findings highlight that women who made the decision to have an abortion were not rejecting motherhood per se, but motherhood in their current situation when they were financially unstable, beginning careers or in education (Mahon et al., 1998). The women felt their current situation was not conducive to parenting.

- In 2006, 5,042 women from the Republic of Ireland travelled to England to have an abortion (UK Department of Health).
- In one study, more than one third of Irish women who had an abortion in the UK said career and job related reasons strongly influenced their decision to abort their pregnancy (Mahon et al., 1998).
- There are lower rates of lone parents in the workplace in Ireland than in other countries (CPA report no. 16).

"I have my life ahead of me and my job. I did not want to give that up at the moment"

Woman in abortion clinic, Mahon et al., 1998

"I think if I had this kid and kept it, I would never, I would never finish it, I would never go back to nursing and I would never be able to keep working and have a child at the same time..."

Woman in abortion clinic, Mahon et al., 1998

- The workplace culture of some environments places an emphasis on long hours and presenteeism for career success. This may affect pregnancy decisions in crisis pregnancy situations; it may be incompatible with the work-life balance needs of mothers or the maternity requirements of pregnant employees (CPA report no. 16).

Childcare

A major obstacle facing pregnant women and their partners is a lack of affordable childcare. This is especially so for women and for couples on low incomes.

- The cost of private childcare is continually increasing. The average cost of childcare in the first quarter of 2005 was €120 per week, representing an increase of over 23% in the two year period between 2002 and 2005. Families in the Dublin region were paying on average €145 per week (CSO, 2005).
- An EU study comparing fifteen countries ranked Ireland last in terms of publicly funded childcare systems. The average rating was 40.87, with Ireland a notable exception at 5.64. (NCP, 2005).

The OECD reports that childcare accounts for 30% of disposable income in Ireland in contrast to the EU average of 8%. Without sufficient numbers of adequately funded childcare places, there are limited options for women who decide to give birth after experiencing a crisis pregnancy. In Ireland it is common for women who go back to employment after giving birth to depend on their family for childcare support. Women without a supportive family member able to assist with childcare, can be forced to reduce the number of hours they work or refrain from working altogether. Lone parents in particular face the trap of employment not being financially worthwhile, and without access to independent financial means, women who parent alone invariably find themselves at risk of poverty (CPA report no. 16).

Pregnancy Discrimination in the Workplace

Research shows that pregnant women face discrimination in working situations and some employers have yet to accept the basic principles of maternity protection. Negative reactions from managers and dismissal or forced resignation due to pregnancy continues to be reported. Fear of negative reactions and/or dismissal may contribute to an unplanned pregnancy being perceived as a crisis or could influence a women's decision about parenting and her future career. Women working in temporary or part-time jobs are most vulnerable as they have no provision for maternity leave or illness (Mahon et al, 1998). On occasion, women are treated negatively when they return to work after having had children.

- Despite being unlawful since 1977, the Equality Authority reports complaints of pregnancy related discrimination as a continuing issue. In 2006 the number of queries under the Maternity Protection Act was 3,716 and under the Parental Leave Acts was 2,195 (The Equality Authority, 2006).
- Some women who gave birth after a crisis pregnancy reported experiencing a career slow (Mahon et al, 1998). In a case brought before the Equality Tribunal where an employee asked her supervisor why she did not get the promotion she applied for, the employer was alleged to have responded it was because she had "been out so long on maternity leave" (The Equality Tribunal, 2005).
- Some women are reluctant to return to jobs after experiencing a negative attitude from employers when they became pregnant (Mahon et al, 1998).

"If you're on minimum-wage job, you can't afford to buy decent childcare and that's just the bottom line, that's the economic reality"

CPA report no. 16

"I think women don't have a choice really, either give up work or stay. I think it's appalling actually. I think even if childcare was affordable, but at the minute it is just exorbitant. You aren't given any enticement to stay in full-time work really"

CPA report no. 6

"...I was treated as a completely different person to the person I'd been before I'd had the child. Immediately I wasn't in line for any type of career progression...therefore you kind of think – is it worth putting all that effort in? Because I'm not going to get any further..."

CPA report no. 16

"They were more pissed off about me being pregnant than I was. They just saw it as this, I don't know, handicap that I was going to cause them so much hassle like, by being pregnant, they've been awful"

Mahon et al., 1998

Work-life Balance Policies, Parenting and Crisis Pregnancy

Employment policies that facilitate compatibility between work and parenting are required to advance an employment culture that supports parents and especially women and men experiencing crisis pregnancy. Women's input is also necessary to sustain economic development (NCPP, 2005). Policies promoting flexibility and gender equality are essential for economic growth and this has been made explicit both at National and European level. Demographic forecasts suggest the utilisation of women's skills is imperative to future success and greater numbers of women will increasingly be needed in the work-force.

- Research has shown flexible working arrangements are beneficial to employers and employees. Flexible policies have been found to motivate employees, increase productivity, meet peak-time demands and attract and retain qualified staff (CPA report no. 16).
- 94% of employers who implemented work-life balance policies in the UK thought people worked best when they could balance their work and home life (CPA report no. 16).
- Organisations that have adopted innovative work practices have benefited from high performance outcomes (CPA report no. 16).
- Many employers do not immediately or obviously see the benefits of work-life balance policies but tend to focus on the costs and difficulties associated with their implementation. The research suggests that business requires tailored advice on how and why these policies are favourable and often highly compatible with business needs. Greater support for enterprises implementing these policies is required.

Want to Read More?

All Crisis Pregnancy Agency research reports referenced in this summary in addition to the ISSHR Survey are available to download from www.crisispregnancy.ie/research.html

Reports from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) are available to download from www.cso.ie

Reports from the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP) are available to download from www.ncpp.ie

Reports from the Equality Authority are available to download from www.equality.ie

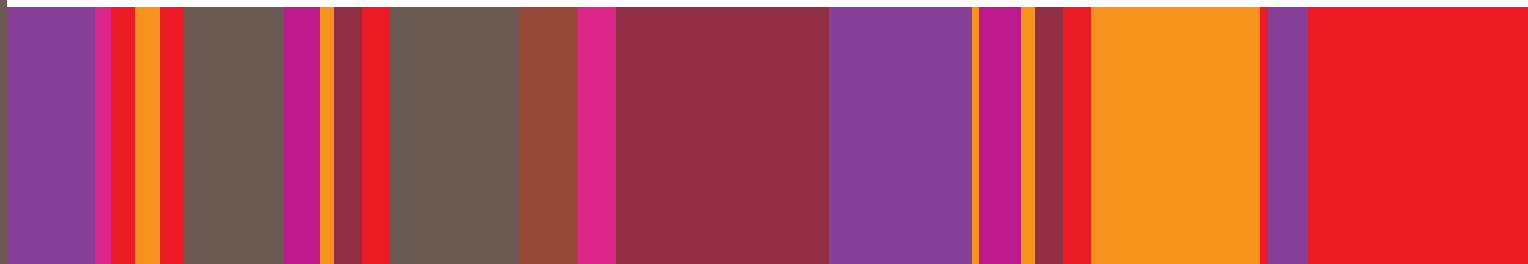
Reports from the OECD are available to download from www.oecd.org

Reports from the European Commission are available to download from www.ec.europa.eu

Reports from the ESRI are available to order/download from www.esri.ie

Annual reports on UK abortion statistics are available to download from www.statistics.gov.uk

Mahon, E., Conlon, C., & Dillon, L. (1998). 'Women & Crisis Pregnancy', Department of Health and Children, Ireland.



Useful Information and Contacts

Crisis Pregnancy Agency

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Keep up to date with the Crisis Pregnancy Agency

Check out the Crisis Pregnancy Agency's website: www.crisispregnancy.ie You can see the latest Irish research on crisis pregnancy and related areas and find out about resources available to those in a crisis pregnancy situation. Sign up to receive our free newsletter, which has information on new research and useful resources. www.crisispregnancy.ie/newsletter.html

Resources for parents

The **'You can talk to me'** booklet and DVD to assist parents in communicating with their children on sexual health and relationships. They are available free of charge from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency or download the booklet at www.crisispregnancy.ie

Contraception and sexual health

THINK CONTRACEPTION - The 'Think Contraception' leaflet and website provide information for young men and women who want to learn more about sexual and reproductive health, especially contraception. The leaflet is available from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, or log on to www.thinkcontraception.ie

CONTRACEPTION 35-55 is a leaflet on fertility, sexual health and contraception for women aged 35-55. It gives information on contraception, fertility and contraceptive options.

Crisis pregnancy advice and counselling

Positive Options is a directory of agencies skilled in the area of crisis pregnancy counselling. The Positive Options leaflet is available from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, log on to www.positiveoptions.ie or Freetext LIST to 50444

Research summaries

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency has produced six research summaries to date. These range from, *Research on Teenage Sexuality*, developed for parents, youth workers and teachers to *Research on Sexual Health* for GPs and practice nurses. Summaries have also been developed for Crisis Pregnancy Counsellors.

Resources for service providers

Key Contact – The Crisis Pregnancy Agency has commissioned a range of information resources for individuals or organisations that may encounter women experiencing a crisis pregnancy.

Key Contact – Responding to Crisis Pregnancy: Information and Service Directory for Community and Health Professionals gives information on how to support a client with a crisis pregnancy and includes a directory of agencies and support services for those experiencing crisis pregnancy.

Key Contact – Directory of Supported Accommodation for Women Experiencing Crisis Pregnancy provides information on supported accommodation services for women experiencing crisis pregnancy and their children.

Key Contact – Reproductive Health Information for Migrant Women is a crisis pregnancy information booklet and CD-ROM with information in seven languages for members of ethnic groups.

Key Contact – Primary Care Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Crisis Pregnancy

Who is the Crisis Pregnancy Agency?

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency is a Government Agency that was set up to plan and implement a strategy to address crisis pregnancy in Ireland. The Agency does not provide services directly to the public, it has a planning and coordinating role and provides funding to other organisations to provide services. There are three main parts to the Agency's work: 1) Prevention of crisis pregnancy; 2) Support for women experiencing crisis pregnancy; 3) Counselling and medical services after crisis pregnancy.