

# Rachel Lara Cohen **Relying on mum at work: Family labour in small firms**

This research considers the contribution made by owners' mothers to the labour needs of small firms. It is suggested that mothers' 'work at work', even in comparison to the work of other family members, seems peculiarly embedded within a domestic rather than a workplace narrative.

## Research Methods

### Empirical research project

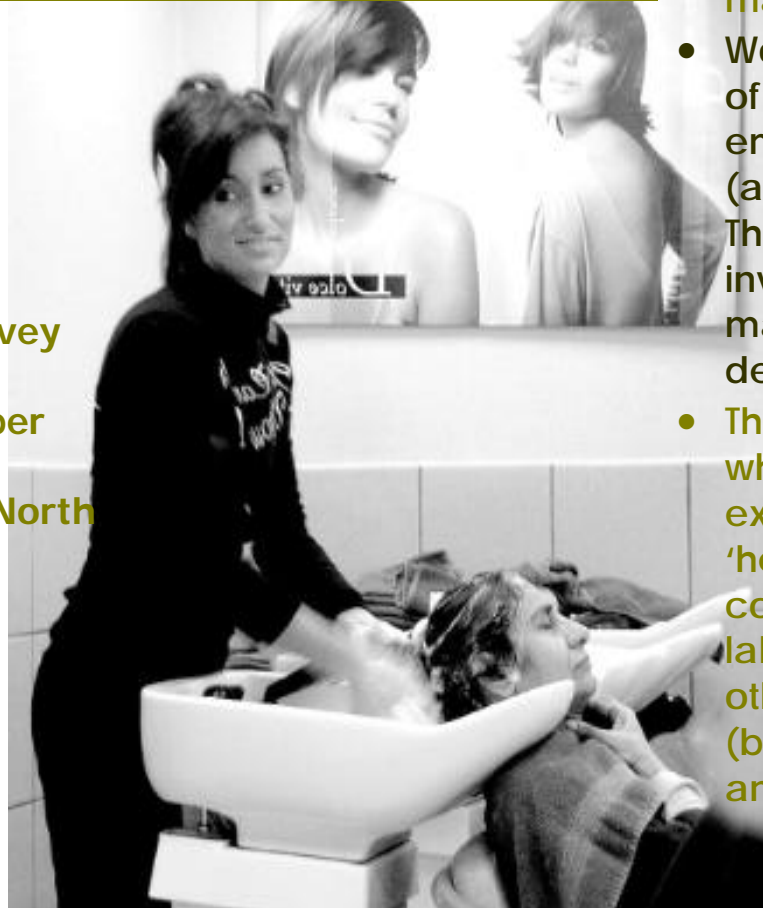
#### Including:

- 32 semi-structured interviews, and
- A self-completion survey (N=93) of owners of hairdressing and barber shops.

Conducted in a city in the North of England

## Keywords

1. Family
2. Small business
3. Hairstyling



## Key Findings/Ideas

- Mothers' work in small businesses is, like that of female spouses, often invisible, and (and also like wives') characterized as 'help' rather than work.
- Unlike wives, mothers provide labour to both male and to female small business owners.
- Women (perhaps in part because of their lack of 'wives') were more likely than men to employ their mothers in the workplace (although the difference was not great). Therefore mothers' work does not necessarily involve a labour transfer from a female to a male family member and so does not describe directly paternalistic relations.
- The gendering of mothers' work is revealed when the work provided by mothers is explored: this work is most often described as 'helping out', a general characterization that contrasts with the skilled or task-specific labour often provided by other family members (brothers, sisters, cousins and children).

Researcher info/contact:  
Dr Rachel Lara Cohen  
Department of Sociology  
University of Warwick  
r.l.cohen@warwick  
02476 575 126