

Women Aged 30-39: why are they the largest demographic to leave teaching every year?

A 2018-21 study by The MTPT Project

02. What did we do, and how did we do it?

Between January and August 2018, The MTPT Project conducted two separate surveys and qualitative telephone interviews to explore why female teachers aged 30-39 represented the largest group of teachers leaving the UK state education system after retirees, according to the Policy Exchange's *The Importance of Teachers* (Simons, 2016). The first survey was for female teachers aged 30-39 who had stayed in the classroom, the second was for female teachers who had left aged 30-39.

Hypothesis

The Policy Exchange report assumed that factors associated with motherhood would be a principal reason for teachers of this demographic leaving the profession – the “motherhood penalty” at work in education. This assumption is anecdotally held in educational circles, as well as more generally in society. However, no further research has been conducted to prove or disprove this theory.

The Schools Workforce Census (2016) indicates that 3.4% of the teacher workforce are on maternity leave at any given time, and a 2009/10 report from the Department for Work and Pensions indicates that 13% of women working in education do not return to work after becoming mothers – this figure, however, incorporates those working in all areas of education, not just EYFS, primary, secondary or post-16 teaching.

Surveys completed by Teacher Tapp in the Autumn of 2017 indicate that teaching can be a job that is uncondusive to having a young family with children aged 4 and under, and the NASUWT's 2016 *Flexible Working: the experiences of teachers* indicates that the lack of flexible working arrangements within education, particularly in leadership positions, could also be a barrier to women aged 30-39 remaining in the classroom.

These figures oppose the contradictory assumption that teaching is a “family friendly” profession, predominantly due to the holiday allowances that match those of primary and secondary aged children. The education sector, as with all other industries, suffers from a “motherhood penalty” and a better understanding of our mother-teachers is needed to prevent continued wastage to the detriment of our students and schools.

Methodology

The MTPT Project sought advice from a number of parties to inform their methodology, confidentiality and ethics statement for both the initial quantitative data survey and the



qualitative telephone interviews. This included Psychology teacher, Lindsay Mould, Dr. Becky Allen and Laura McInerney, Anna Tretheway, Dr. Kate O’Shaughnessy and Jack Worth. Whilst every effort was made by The MTPT Project to ensure that this research project was academically robust, and the volume of responses to both our surveys and qualitative interviews is significant, it is important to note that our sampling method was restricted, and this report has not been verified or validated by a formal academic body.

To our knowledge, the survey was shared in a number of forums which in themselves would have created a self-selecting sample bias. Survey respondents opted in to contributing to the study when it was shared through the following channels:

- Facebook groups: The MTPT Project page, regional “Mum” groups, academic groups, subject teacher groups, tutoring groups, expat teacher groups, flexible working groups and personal interest groups of members of The MTPT Project
- Tweets and retweets from the @maternityCPD Twitter handle
- The MTPT Project website
- The MTPT Project Spring 2018 newsletter
- The WomenEd April 2018 newsletter
- The Teach First London April 2018 ambassador newsletter

Both surveys asked teachers to indicate their reasons for staying or leaving, choosing from a list of options. This option list was designed based on the following reports into teacher retention and engagement, and the retention of women in other industries:

- The Importance of Teachers: a collection of essays on teacher recruitment and retention (Policy Exchange, 2016)
- Schools Workforce Census (DfE, 2016)
- Maternity and Paternity Rights and Women Returners Survey 2009/10 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2009-10)
- Engaging Teachers: NFER Analysis of Teacher Retention (NFER, 2016)
- Teacher Turnover, Wastage and Destinations (University of Liverpool, 2002)
- Should I Stay or Should I Go? NFER Analysis of Teachers Joining and Leaving the Profession (NFER, 2015)
- Managing Your Maternity Leave (CIPR, The Talent Keeper Specialists, *no longer available*)
- Teacher Retention and Turnover Research Update 3: Is the Grass Greener Beyond Teaching? (NFER, 2017)
- Recruitment and retention of teachers (House of Commons Education Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2016-17)
- Teachers Returning to the Profession (NCTL, 2014)
- Healthy Teachers, Higher Marks? (The Work Foundation, Lancashire University, 2014)
- Focus on Working Parents (CIPD, 2016)
- Flexible Teacher Retention and Turnover Research (NFER, 2017)
- Flexible working: The Experiences of Teachers (NASUWT, 2016)



- Top Employers for Working Families Benchmark Summary Report (Working Families UK, 2017)
- Flexible Working and Work Life Balance (ACAS, 2015)
- Is Teaching Compatible with Parenthood (TeacherTapp, 2017)
- Flexible working: provision and uptake (CIPD, 2012)
- The Gender Pay Gap (IFS, 2016)
- Department for Education Reports Gender Pay Gap (DfE, 2017)
- The Motherhood Pay Penalty (TUC, 2016)
- Pregnancy and maternity discrimination research findings (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016)

Respondents were allowed to choose any relevant options, and a free text box was also provided for “other” reasons. The “Staying in Teaching” survey received 568 responses, 518 of which were valid. The “Leaving Teaching” survey received 533 responses, 498 of which were valid.

In both surveys, respondents were invited to take part in a qualitative telephone interview providing more detail about how the reasons they had selected had influenced their decision to stay in, or leave teaching. Both interviews followed a set script with minimal additional interaction from the interviewers. Where teachers had indicated that they were mothers, three follow-up questions were posed:

- *Your responses have indicated that you are a mother: could we confirm that this is correct?*
- *How old are your children now?*
- *The main area of focus of The MTPT Project is the impact of parental leave on a female teacher’s working life. Can you describe your maternity leave experience(s) to me?*

Interview participants were then invited to respond freely to the third, open-ended question.

The interviews were conducted by a team of three interviewers – Emma Sheppard, Elaine Brown and Helen Pengelly – in August to October 2018. 236 of the original 568 respondents to the “Staying in Teaching” survey indicated that they would be happy to expand on their survey responses in a telephone interview, of which 44 took place and 42 were able to be transcribed to be analysed as qualitative data. 245 of the original 498 respondents to the “Leaving Teaching” survey indicated that they would be happy to expand on their survey responses in a telephone interview, of which 38 took place and 34 were able to be transcribed to be analysed as qualitative data.

The interviews were then transcribed by a mixture of volunteers and transcription software, before being analysed using the software Quirkos, to pull out the main themes in four separate demographics:

- Women who left teaching aged 30-39 who are mothers





- Women who left teaching aged 30-39
- Women who have stayed in teaching aged 30-39 who are mothers
- Women who have stayed in teaching aged 30-39

