**Transcript**

December 4, 2024, 1:06PM

 **Viki Veale** started transcription

 **Viki Veale** 0:03
We're joined today by Emma Shepherd from the maternity teacher, paternity teacher Project Emma's here today to talk to us about the Impact Parenthood has on teacher well-being.

 **Emma Sheppard - The MTPT Project** 0:16
Good morning and well, good afternoon actually. Thank you. Thank you for for having me. I'm I'm going to just do a little bit of an exploration through the the research that we have on this particular topic.
And do that slightly annoying thing. Well, I'll tell you all the the bad news. Some of the good news. And then briefly mention some strategies at the end, because actually it's such a it's such an enormous topic that becomes a bit of an Aladdin's cave when you when you jump into it. But before we start off just a little bit of information about the Mtpt project, even new to us.
So we were founded in 2016 when I went on maternity leave with my son Hugo as a lead practitioner working in South London. At the time an English teacher.
And found that when I went on leave, I was bored. Frankly, I'm going to talk a little bit about that boredom and and how that's linked to teacher identity.
And well-being a little bit later in the session. So initially I founded a a network sort of grassroots network to inspire, empower and connect teachers who were choosing to complete professional development whilst on parental leave.
And over the last eight years, it's grown into EU, KS only charity for parent teachers. So we got charity stages in 2020. We have a board of trustees and a team of 4040 or more volunteers who support us in building network around the country in coaching and delivering conference and training sessions as well, and doing various other things in terms of campaigning and just generally I'm supporting here and there where we need them to.
We support colleagues working in education.
Use the word teachers because it's the easiest way to say trainees support staff leaders, central trust staff, anybody working in education.
From the point of when they are thinking about starting families all the way through to when they are balancing their careers with with young being parents to young children, we offer coaching programmes, return to work, workshops, coffee mornings for our grassroots community, social media, a virtual conference. We have a website full of case studies. We have a book.
And then on the other side of things, we do sort of we work on the system's change, so supporting scores to become more life friendly places to work campaigning at DfE level to bring about some national changes to support not just our parent teacher community, but informed by our parent teacher community to support the sustainability of the professional more widely. So we're sort of working at those ends. And one of the things that we do is.
Work around the research involved in the motherhood penalty and how it's impacted.
Our education sector. So before we turned up and actually started to ask the right questions to the right people, we didn't know very much about.
How much motherhood was impacting women's careers in education as a female dominated profession, or how much it was impacting some of the trends that we're seeing in retention and attrition and leadership? So this is something I actually did whilst I was heavily pregnant with my daughter Lucy.
I pulled together the the research that we did have available and to sort of track a typical woman's career progression if she chooses or can become a mother, and if and she works in education. This has been added to over the years and some of these statistics and the the date that we were able to attain them are really indicative of how little we're paying attention to to this group of people so.
If we start up in the top left hand corner on my screen, it says 76% of teachers are women. We know that we're a female dominated industry.
And around half of our teachers, male and female, have children under the age of 18, which is pretty standard according to.
The National Statistics of everybody in in the workforce, in all industries. Now what we didn't know until about April of this year when a very nice man called Jack Worth at the NF AR pulled some figures from us from the Labour Workforce Survey was that is that 67% of our female teachers aged 30 to 39 are mothers and 77% of our female teachers aged 40 to 49 are mothers.
So we just didn't have that data prior to 2024 because the schools Workforce Census doesn't ask for for parenting status.
And we have to go fairly deeply into other data sets in order to to pull that data out. Now another statistics that we didn't know until 2018 when I was on maternity leave with Lucy is that about 4.8% of our workforce are on maternity leave at any given time.
So I did a very clunky survey back in 2018. I then had the opportunity to present that clunky data to the DfE with a sort of seven week old Lucy strapped to me. The DfE analyst came up to me and said, where have you got that data from? It's not accurate. And I said, well, I did put a Freedom of Information request in please do answer it. And so lo and behold, they aren't staff free of Freedom of Information request and I put that same request in every two or three years or so just to get updated figures.
So our most recent request revealed that about 20,000 just under so 19,985 teachers are on maternity leave at any given time. So that's the number that are on maternity leave right now.
And that starts to to build us a picture of the fact that 20,000 women.
May suffer from the mother motherhood penalty every single year, which could be the thing that's leading to so many of them leaving the profession. So women aged 30 to 39 are the largest demographic to leave teaching every single year. That's been the same since 2000 and 1721% of them, 21% of our leavers were in that age bracket. This year the largest group.
Which is about 9147 at the last count. Now that's more than our younger teachers than the previous decade, more than all of our female teachers aged 20 to 29, altogether and.
Just just over all of our 25 to 29 year olds of both agendas put together. So in sheer numbers we're losing a great deal of experienced teachers in that age bracket and we're losing them because of motherhood penalty, which I'll get onto in a moment.
Now when we do lose them, more than half of them don't return to the classroom, and that's only been an issue that's increased post pandemic because of the increased flexibility and work from home conditions in other industries that are more logistically compatible to the demands of of caring for a young family when they stay, women dominate part time positions. So 27% of female teachers work part time in comparison to 8% of male teachers.
And whilst part time working is really helpful.
Over this transition period, it does obviously contribute to the gender pay gap because part time salaries are prorated and there are lots of other complexities around part time working that lead to stagnation that lead to unfair pay and that lead to women losing out financially and and professionally in terms of their job satisfaction. Now the gender pay gap in education is terrible 20.4%.
Is our gender pay gap, which for a profession dominated by women is quite shocking and it's a gap that widens every single.
Phase of leadership classroom teaching or leadership between the ages of 35 to 39. So actually as a primary school teacher, primary school classroom teacher, women out earn their male counterparts until the ages of 35 to 39, when they're most likely to become mothers. And we see that motherhood penalty hitting their wallets now, this is probably why we have such disparity in in leadership when it comes to gender so.
65% of our head teachers across primary and secondary are mothers, which sounds like a good figure, but obviously if 76% of our teachers are women.
And then we've got an 11% difference there. It's even worse at secondary level, where only 40% of heads are women.
And what's also very interesting is that of those female head teachers, only 63% of them are mothers, whereas 90% of male head teachers are fathers. So easier to be a father and a head teacher than it is a mother and a head teacher. And that statistic in particular seems to be pointing at the fact that women feel they have to choose still between their career progression and their personal lives.
Whereas men don't seem to be feeling that trend as severely. So that's what we now know about the motherhood penalty and how it's impacting individuals and the workforce more widely.
And we, we found out some of that or we sort of embedded some of that through a study that we did in 2018.
And in that study, we sort of saw well-being coming out at different stages in our in our, in our data set.
Around the sort of progression of parenthood, so trigger points that we saw for poor well-being included the conception period. So colleagues undergoing fertility treatment and that being incredibly challenging and in some cases.
Pushing them to leave the profession because it wasn't compatible with that process missed or early miscarriages, adding to poor well-being and distress and and poor mental health discrimination at interview level or when it comes to progression.
Or or sort of sideways moves, for example, for being of child bearing age. So being a risky hire because you may get pregnant soon, and also then on the flip side, the social pressure around parenthood for colleagues who either don't want children but are being told that they should be having children because that's what women do or wanting to have children, it not happening for various reasons.
And and still having that social pressure that that damages their well-being because they do want children and it's not happening.
Second trigger point is is around pregnancy when somebody is pregnant or expectant. So there are the physical challenges associated with pregnancy that had a knock on impact on mental health and well-being pregnancy related sicknesses.
So in terms of physical challenges, I'm talking about things like fatigue, things like sciatica.
Maybe diabetes brought on by pregnancy and then pregnancy related sickness. Are you morning sicknesses or hyperhidros gravidarium or?
Having to be on bed rest for various things, for example lots of instances of discrimination still in the workforce around pregnancy and the limitation of occupational mobility now because of the way that our enhanced maternity pay is done in teaching we have, we don't have day one entitlements in almost every single school. The Burgundy book says that we have to work at a school for a certain amount of time in order to get our enhanced pay.
Which means if somebody is even thinking about family planning, they might forgo opportunities in order to remain in the same position, remain in the same school in order to get.
Their enhanced pay and they also have to do they have to fulfil clawback periods, which means they have to come back to work for 13 weeks in order to avoid paying back their enhanced pay, so that occupational mobility can lead to stagnation remaining in schools where they're not very happy remaining in roles where they don't necessarily feel fulfilled, feeling frustrated about not having greater career progression and then perinatal mental health. So anxiety, depression.
And other other mental health issues are because of the perinatal period and the experience of being pregnant.
Once a baby comes along, it's not all fixed. Unfortunately. We were hearing in experiences of being very isolated and very bored on maternity leave, so feeling very cut off from their their friendship, their social communities and their professional communities.
Discrimination or poor treatment from school during that leave period.
Post Natal mental health came up quite a number of times in our research in terms of impacting the the Leave period, but also then returning to work before that post Natal depression or anxiety or psychosis.
Was properly resolved, so that sort of falling into the workplace as well and not being supported or lack of understanding the workplace for that. And then I've spoken predominantly about women, about mothers so far, but also poor leave entitlements for fathers and non birthing partners making life very difficult for for new parents returning to work after a week or two weeks, leaving their partners feeling very guilty about going back to work and also feeling.
Very overwhelmed with having to, you know, in try and enjoy a newborn at home and also then manage their their timetables.
Under pressure, then, of being that gendered role of the breadwinner.
Now, when colleagues come back to work, our research demonstrates that return to work transition period can be very challenging, even even if it is well supported, exhaustion overwhelm our contribute to poor mental health. Again, even when schools are very supportive, the pure, the pure nature of going back to work whilst having a young baby at home or a young child at home is exhausting, they might not sleep very well and and.
Sleep deprivation has a huge negative knock on effect discrimination in that return to work period so.
Women finding their careers were stagnating, that they're flexible, working profession being denied and that professionalism was being questioned, that all sorts of bullying behaviour was going on because they they were sort of seen as less valuable or seen as an inconvenience. Unequal domestic balance at home, even when women work return to work so that the concept of women trying to do it all and and sort of starting one shift at school and then coming home to a second.
Unpaid shifter home and having absolutely no time for themselves.
Career stagnation as a result of prejudice and discrimination, or the logistics, the motherhood penalty taking the time away from them. They would otherwise have dedicated their to their career and lots and lots of guilt from all parents, not just the famous mum guilt, but parent guilt and sort of knocking on people's mental health. Now all of that we we sort of.
Originally found in our 2018 report, which I call doing the washing up badly.
Because back in 2018, when I was on leave with Lucy, I'd spoken to a number of think tanks and universities about the the the motherhood penalty and the issues that we were seeing and the and the obvious workforce implications that we were seeing. And they I was told that it wasn't a priority for for research at the time. So I thought, well, I'll get on and do it, I'll do the washing up badly and then somebody will come and see how badly I've done the washing up.
And take it away from me and never ask me to do it again. But at least the attention will be drawn to this issue and I would have made a lot of noise clattering around.
With my washing up for somebody to come and say, come over and see what I was doing. Now that did happen. So a lady called Anna McShane, who runs a think tank called the New Britain Project and she's been in contact with me in 2020, just before lockdown. She then had two, two more children. She's got four children. She's set up a think tank. She did an NBA because what else are you going to do on your maternity leave? And she came back to me in 2024 earlier this year and said right, let's go. Let's use the methodology. Let's update it a little bit.
Let's go out to your community and and get these insights, and that's where we got the missing mother report.
From it was on the BBC. We've since had coverage in the Guardian, so really seeing for the first time these issues having national gaining national attention, which is really, really exciting and we know that that report in particular is influencing conversations in government in a way that we are very happy that they are now. What we find found was that in 2018 you can see women were leaving for the these were the top eight reasons that they chose out of a list of of reasons they were able to select.
So that's why these these percentages don't add up to 100, but in when that was repeated in 2024, asking them why they left and we're seeing mental health and well-being being right up there. So third on the list in 2018 and 2nd on the list in 2024 and obviously there's a lot of overlap there between workload contributing to poor well-being.
Lifestyle choice being tied in in how we are defining lifestyle choices there in terms of seeking a better work life balance.
So pursuing other interests sort of supporting well-being and then we can see the mother penalty at play there in terms of family commitment and childcare logistics down there at #8 and implicitly #7 lack of flexible part time, working arrangements in teaching, obviously school culture and pressure from educational monitoring bodies and school leadership also having that negative knock on effect on mental health and well-being.
So I just wanted to share a couple of insights from those interview participants.
Because I think that really brings it to life in terms of what they were talking about when they mentioned their mental health or their well-being in the interviews and we had 1000 survey responses in total who had left and who had stayed in the profession. And then we had about 80 interviews, forty of which were from. That's not true, about 35 of which, who were from leavers and and just over 40 who were from stayers.
So I'll just I'll read these. I know you can read them off the screen, but I'll read them and just in case you're listening in.
One participant said I wanted to be working fewer hours and just have more time, whatever it might be, or I wanted to do.
Partly that might be spending time with my husband and children, but also just reading books for fun and seeing friends. When I was teaching, even when I was single and living in London, I rarely went out during the week and met friends for a drink or the theatre.
Another participant and these are all mothers. So we we interviewed the mothers rather than we sort of zoomed in there, another participant said. Like a lot of women, I do like to do things well, which led me to putting in so many hours. I don't think I ever felt on top of work ever. There was always. There was always more that I should be doing.
Two more to share, another participant said very bluntly. I had a mental breakdown. It started when I was pregnant with my third child due to the workload as head of department. All this extra pressure being put on me being told by senior management, I should be doing my work more and more at home. I'm not having time to do it at work. I was signed off work through stress and then developed post Natal depression.
The last participant that I'll talk about here said if I take time off, I'm putting the children in an awkward position and putting my team in an awkward position. And when I go back, there's going to be a million things I'm going to have to catch up on. It makes it not worth taking the time off and people can get to a point where they cannot carry on. So a really complex picture around the the experience of of well-being and mental health one, as with the teacher identity. But then with the mother identity added in.
Essentially, people push them, are pushed to breaking point.
Or pushed to to this point of burnout, or push to the point of having to make a significant decision about what they want to do with their lives and what they're able to do now that they are parents.
Now what was interesting was from the 2024 Missing Mothers report, we found that that transition period over the maternity, the maternity transition period was really, really essential and something that is really not being attended to in the way that it could be at the moment. So of those colleagues who'd left that we interviewed in 2024 or we surveyed in 2024.
Only 27% were happy with the transition support that they received from their school, and even those who stayed in the profession when we were interviewing them, only 38% of them were happy with that maternity transition support. So if somebody has had a brilliant pregnancy, a brilliant leave and then they come back to work and they're not supported, that is the beginning of the sort of \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* impact of of poor mental health and and poor experiences.
So that is a particular focus of ours. This year is getting that maternity transition period, right. And unfortunately it doesn't last for three days when they're doing a few kit days and coming back to work, we consider that maternity transition period from the point that they start their leave all the way through to when their youngest child is five and starting school. So we call it the extended return to work period because that's what our research is showing is when colleagues are at most risk.
Of leaving the profession if things aren't going well.
Now in terms of wider research, we're we're seeing some of the things that we saw in our in our interviews and our survey there happening with all demographics. So this is the education support world teacher well-being index from this year. I think it's only just recently come out. So that's nicely timed and that found 77% of all staff experience symptoms of poor mental health due to work, 46% experience, insomnia or difficulty sleeping. And I picked that out because it's so relevant to our teacher demographic in terms of sleep and sleep.
And interrupted sleep.
With children and then plus if that sleep is then interrupted because of anxiety or because of stress on top of the children waking you up in the middle of the night, for example, is particularly challenging, and then only 27% of staff feeling that their institutional institutions organisational culture has a positive effect on them. Mental health and well-being 50% of staff feeling that their organisational culture has a negative effect on their staff, mental health and well-being.
Reflecting that school culture and the pressure that we saw in our survey in 2018.
What I think is really interesting is how teachers profile when it comes to two big mental health conditions, their anxiety and depression, and we are more likely as teachers to suffer from both in comparison to the rest of the rest of the nation and other industries. The adult population. I don't know if that's because anxious and depressed people are more likely to choose teaching as a career or because we're fine when we come into teaching, but teaching makes us anxious and depressed.
But I think my my reflection there is that if.
We are already at a point of anxiety or depression or at risk of anxiety and depression, and then we have become pregnant and we have additional issues of perinatal or post Natal anxiety and depression, and that is again just an additional layer in terms of our mental health that that is happening and obviously post Natal depression and anxiety is also something that can happen to fathers and it's something that isn't as talked about because of the taboos surrounding.
Men's mental health.
So thankfully some some organisations like.
Like parenting out loud that campaign, the dad shift and the Fatherhood Institute are talking more about men's experiences of poor mental health when it comes to fatherhood.
Let's pivot a little bit and maybe start talking about some of the good news. So Edurio did a survey the beginning of this year.
Staff well-being in academies, I think the report is called.
And Adurio are one of the first people to actually disaggregate that data, according to parenthood. So I know that teacher tap asked the parenthood questions. They know which of their respondents are parents, and they can disaggregate that data if they want to.
But most.
Most surveys will not ask the parenthood question because it's not something that's asked on the school's workforce census. So we we often we ask about ethnicity, we sometimes ask about religion, we ask about gender, we ask about sexuality.
We ask that disability, but we rarely actually in in big surveys, asked about parenthood. The jury, I found something very nice. They found that there are.
Amongst staff who are parents, there were reported higher higher reported levels of overall well beings, lower levels of stress.
Workload.
And parents were more likely to feel report, feeling excited about their work.
But they were more tired, so they had lower sleep quality, which which makes sense. But what I found really encouraging about that is that when it works and when colleagues stay and they can get over that challenging period of being a parent to a young child in our education system and actually teaching becomes a very positive and exciting.
Career for them to have as parents gives them the holidays, gives them that sense of purpose, of contributing to something that they believe and that their own child is a part of. They look at their students, they see they see a somebody's child.
And all those sort of typical narratives around why parenting and teaching are are such complementary careers.
But if we lose them in that in that challenging period or if we don't improve the support over that challenging period, then they don't get to this sort of happy Elysium field.
Now back to our 2018 report. We found that actually these are the reasons that colleagues stay in the profession. The one that I could equate most strongly to mental health and well-being was job satisfaction.
So, colleagues really enjoying their jobs and feeling really engaged in what they do. But in this, in the interviews we had a couple bit more clarity around how that was linking to colleagues, mental health. So again, all of these sound bites up from mothers who remained in the profession and they were aged 30 to 39 when we interviewed them back in 2018.
First participant said, I feel that going back to work after maternity leave has probably done me more good than being on maternity leave, even though it's lovely to have my little boy for me.
It was a hard time, so actually a lot of positive well-being and positive identity is is associated with colleagues, professional identities. We don't all want to be sitting at home looking after our children in the minute we become parents actually being at work is is a really important part of who we are.
Another participant said in terms of the mum guilt, if you know that it's only seven or eight weeks maximum before you get to spend a good chunk of time with them and it does help having the holiday. So again, that sort of gratitude, that perspective of saying that famine and feast pattern of teaching can actually be really, really beneficial in comparison to other careers.
Another colleague said the variety in the classroom, I get bored at home. I get lonely because there were so many people all day long. It's a bit too quiet at home. I think at school it's just I like the routine and I like being busy. So routine, not necessary. Something I always have on maternity leave and then last, participants said some days I'm just glad that I'm able to function for the whole day because my son had that such a bad night.
But I couldn't stay at home all day because I'd lose my mind. So I just really enjoyed the fragments of some of these comments, but also the complexity of it. Yes, it can be challenging.
But school and work actually being a source of positive well-being in comparison to domestic life.
So I know that we're at, we're a small group, but I just wanted to to pause for a moment. We might come back to this once we stop recording at the end. But for anybody who's watching the recording to consider what surprised you about this data and whether there's anything that's resonated with you and for our live audience, I'll, I'll come back to this after I've got a couple more slides and then we can stop the recording and and and have that chat.
But essentially this is the bit where I throw the strategies at you in the last 30 seconds of the presentation, but these are the things that we know from our 2018 and our 2024 survey and from the surrounding research and from our community in general. We have many WhatsApp groups and many opportunities to share and talk to each other and and discuss these things.
These are strategies that support positive well-being for this parent teach demographic.
Flexibility and flexible working. So whether that's a formal arrangement or just knowing that your school will support you if your childcare falls through, or if you want to go and see their school play, or if you want to go and do the nature trail with them on that that Thursday morning knowing that that will be granted or supported in some way.
Effective and positive communication, so a lot of our participants spoke about little or no communication or really horrible communication over the pregnancy leave and return to work. Period.
Supportive maternity transition in the form of coaching, return to work workshops that we offer, but also that contact with the school and having a process and a policy attached to the return to work, not just coming back and being expected to teach a full time table that very same day across 14 classrooms outside of your subject area because thank goodness you're back. We need you.
Strong school systems that allow for absence that particularly is helpful for the guilt. So knowing that if you cannot be there physically one day, the whole school will not fall apart because it's a slick machine.
But also that if you are not there for a day or two because you've got your own children to look after or you know, goodness forbid, that you are under the weather yourself and actually need to take care of your your own physical health, and that your classroom will not be trashed when you come back, that there won't have been loads of wasted learning. But actually that the systems are in place for learning to continue in your absence manageable workloads. I don't think any of the speak teachers that we spoke to didn't want to do the work that needed to be done.
So I'm not talking about light workloads because that we I think everybody was realistic about teaching being a career that had a workload attached to it, but they wanted that work to be manageable, meaningful and purposeful as in, not for the sake of it. They wanted to understand why they were putting the energy and the time in and compassionate leadership.
So many instances can be solved with consideration and kindness and understanding.
And we have heard so many examples of spite and mean leadership and unnecessary.
Insecurities. Or you know following procedure for the sake of it, without thinking about the human involved and a lot of these things come down to.
Somebody at the top saying I'm a human being. You're a human being. Let's be compassionate and figure this out together. And so we can stop. Oh, no, I'm not making it up because why puts in there? Because again, from our 2024 missing Mother's report, when we asked participants what has enabled you to stay in teaching, these were the things they were talking about, South supportive school policies and culture around that parenting need work, life balance.
Flexibility and ability to find part time roles. So again a very clear definition between part time and flexibility.
So part time or flexible working being something formal, flexibility being I work full time. Oh goodness. I need 30 minutes to deal with this or.
I would really love to be able to be there in person for this moment.
But otherwise I work full time for the rest of the year, and I like the structure and I like the routine. And I like compartmentalising my life in my classroom and in my home.
We've got loads of opportunities to actually act on this, so that's good that we're recording because you can flash the QR code there for our event right page, but we offer.
Fully funded group coaching for colleagues whilst they're on parental leave, fully funded return to work workshops at 7 \* a year.
We offer paid for group coaching when they come back to work and paid for one to one coaching. We're involved with the flexible working ambassador, schools and maths programme and they have a whole suite of free webinars at that address. Flexible working in education.co.uk. That's a DfE run programme so proves that the DfE support flexible working in school, so if you're not on board with that whole flexible working conversation then you are behind the time the times.
Sorry to be so blunt about it, but you are and we also offer paid for training for school and systems leaders. We have a life friend leadership programme that we offer bespoke training like this and in set sessions to two organisations. So thank you very much. I'll go back to that reflection slide to stop the recording and have a chat.

 **Viki Veale** 33:35
Thank you so much, Emma. I'm gonna stop right there.

 **Viki Veale** stopped transcription