

# The invisible statistic: an investigation into student teacher mothers' perceptions of their experiences during the Secondary Initial Teacher Education year and implications for leaders in schools and Higher Education

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# Proposed study

- Explores the perceptions and experiences of student teachers who are mothers, and who are following the Secondary PGCE course at a UK institution.
- PGCE year is challenging.
- Coping with the heavy workload is likely to be even more difficult for women who care for children of their own.
- Research literature on the mutual impact of motherhood and career indicates that women continue to assume primary responsibility for childcare, and make career choices within the constraints of their lives and responsibilities.

# Tensions and challenges

- Research conducted by the National Union of Students (2013) found that students with caring responsibilities were more likely to report that they had seriously considered leaving their course, as well as had experienced financial worries and lower well-being than those without such responsibilities.
- The lack of publicity for resources (for example, breastfeeding and changing facilities as well as financial support) designed to support pregnant and parenting students (Brown and Nichols, 2012), rules and expectations regarding children coming onto campus (NUS, 2009) and inflexible HE practices related to teaching and examinations (Estes, 2011).

“

By rendering carers, children and pregnant bodies invisible in academia, media, national policy and university ‘texts’ regulate (the) student body/ies and normalise the association of the ‘bachelor boy’ with HE (Moreau, 2016,p. 913).

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# Student mothers: the missing statistic

- Little work on the experiences of mothers who become student teachers.
- UK equality of opportunity monitoring systems in HE fail to consider the specific needs and experiences of women with children - significant gap
- Given the reported teacher and headteacher shortage, needs of student teacher mothers may be worthy of consideration if we are to attract able teachers into the profession, and ultimately, headship.

# Pilot study report: a brief summary

- Stimulated narratives at end of ITE year
- Approx. 6 images provided basis for narratives
- Insights into the challenges women faced, developing identities as teachers & reflections on career trajectories

# Emergent themes

- Sources of conflict
- Practical difficulties
- Sources of support



# Sources of conflict 1

Coping with the dual role of teacher and mother, feeling torn:

‘I'll show you a picture of her... It's been difficult not...I did want one of her first birthday, because I didn't get to spend the day with her because it was the first day of induction for Phase B . So, there was no way around at all’ (Gina)





## Sources of conflict 2: Assuming primary responsibility for childcare & housework

‘ I'm very **confident with children**. My mother... I've got five younger than me...five brothers and sisters younger than me. So even throughout secondary school, my mother was like having baby, baby, baby and it was kind of us older three, and then when my two older brothers and sisters left, it was me looking after babies. ... **I know what to do, what I have to do, what not to do....** yeah I think [**husband**] **would panic** a bit... So, I couldn't see him staying at home...And he'd probably **play his games** more’ (Gina).

‘He does a great job in terms of being a Dad. He is fantastic and I can't fault him, but in terms of being at home and doing things around the home, **he's not great**. So, when I'm at home **I feel I have to do it**’ (Wendy) .

# Practical difficulties

- Transport and travel – getting to school placements
- Financial difficulties
- Time management



# Sources of support

- Other students, especially mothers
- Organised childcare provision
- Social networks
- Staff in school



# Implications for HE: how can universities support mothers?

- Acknowledge they are a group in need of support & be proactive in welcoming them
- Make regularly updated guides for student parents available online
- Offer advice and support with financial issues
- Provide clearer information in advance about key dates on programme
- Information about placements earlier
- Childcare provision? Helpful for University staff too

## Pilot study (2): current

- 11 participants at end of PGCE year, including some who dropped out
- Including primary, secondary and SCITT
- Semi-structured interviews eliciting retrospective account of their experiences during the ITE year

# Further research

Larger sample of student teachers, interviews at three points of year

Experiences of mothers (parents?) as students on broader range of programmes

Investigations into the perceptions of students/student teachers regarding men's and women's responsibilities for childrearing and housework; how institutions might develop family-friendly policies

# References

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