

# How much parental leave do Māori mothers want, and how much do they actually take?



Māori mothers, whāea, would prefer to take an average of 66 weeks of leave with their tamaiti, according to data from the Growing Up in New Zealand study. Whāea expected to take 32 weeks. The average amount of time before returning to paid work was 49 weeks, closer to the desired amount.

The Growing Up in New Zealand (GUINZ) study is a longitudinal study of 6,000 mothers and their children, which began with pre-birth interviews in 2009. Because GUINZ tracks families over time, it's a useful way to learn about mothers.

Motu has conducted research based on the GUINZ study and provided Manatū Wāhine with a series of reports and data. The data we've used for this report covers the whāea Māori in the study who were working before birth (318 wāhine total), and summarises outcomes based on maternal leave and return to work.

## Preferred, anticipated and actual leave

Whāea **preferred** to take an average of **66 weeks leave**.

- Wāhine working in self-employment, or those born overseas, preferred to take significantly less leave than average.
- Wāhine who said they were experiencing financial stress before birth preferred to take more leave than average (but anticipated they'd take a similar amount to other wāhine).

Whāea **anticipated** that they'd be able to take an average of **32 weeks leave**.

- Where mothers anticipated less leave than preferred, the main reason provided was "financial reasons".
- Wāhine who were self-employed anticipated significantly less leave than average.
- Wāhine who identified as both Pākehā and Māori anticipated taking more leave than average.

Whāea took an average of **49 weeks of actual leave** – but there were a wide range of outcomes.

- Around 40 percent of wāhine took fewer than 20 weeks of leave, while 20 percent took a year or longer – with roughly 8 percent of wāhine spending two years or more out of the labour market.
- Wāhine who had planned their pregnancy took more leave than average.

## Reasons given for returning (or not returning) to work

Nine months after the birth of their tamaiti, 59 percent of wāhine had returned to work. More than one reason could be given for returning to work. The top reasons given by wāhine who had returned to work were:

- need the money (80%)
- enjoy working (53%)
- exhausted paid parental leave (42%).

These reasons were consistent regardless of whether the wāhine had anticipated returning to work by that time or not.

The remaining 41 percent had not returned to work by nine months. Among these wāhine, the top reasons given for not returning were:

- they were still on leave from their job (50%)
- they were busy with their child or family (35%).

Being busy with tamariki and whānau could be related to difficulties in accessing childcare.

Motu has conducted broader research based on the GUiNZ data, published on the Manatū Wāhine [website](#), showing that nine months after birth 12.9 percent of wāhine Māori (without any other ethnic affiliations) said their tamariki were not in childcare because of cost or access issues, compared with only 5.7 percent of whāea Pākehā. Two years after giving birth, this percentage of wāhine Māori facing cost or access issues rose to 15.7 percent.

According to these mothers, cost was the main barrier – identified by 4.5 percent of all whāea Māori at nine months, and 8.1 percent at two years. Other issues identified included no childcare places available, or location and transport difficulties associated with their nearest childcare centre.

To learn more about leave taking preferences for all GUiNZ participants, you can read Motu and the Ministry of Social Development's full report [here](#).