Pregnancy, Parenting, and Postdocs

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Objectives

• What do we know about the postdoc parent experience?
• What protections do postdoc parents have?
• How can postdocs—and their institutions—better navigate the challenges postdoc parents face?
Leaks in the Pipeline to Tenure for Women PhDs in the Sciences

- **PhD Receipt**
  - Married Fathers
  - Single Women
  - Married Mothers

- **Entering Tenure Track Position**
  - Married Mothers: 35% lower odds than married fathers to get a tenure-track position

- **Achieving Tenure**
  - Married Mothers: 27% lower odds than married fathers with young children to become tenured

Single Women: Single women without children do almost the same as married fathers.
Mothers Often Make Their Decisions Earlier

Twice as many women then men are likely to change their career goal away from being a research professor when they have babies as post docs.
Shifting Career Goal away from Professor with Research Emphasis (UC Postdoctoral Scholars)

- New children since postdoc: 41% (N=56)
- Children previous to postdoc: 32% (N=62)
- Percent of Postdocs with Professor with Research Emphasis Goal at Start Who Shifted Career Goal to Another by Time of Survey

Postdoc Parent Study

Two surveys:
- 66 institutions
- 800+ births or adoptions
Most of the news is good news!

Not only a “women’s issue”

• Men experienced discrimination, too
• Postdocs of color fared worse
1. No policy or policy confusion

2. Burden falls to PI and Postdoc

3. DANGER!!
Pregnancy Accommodations

What is the law on accommodations?
Accommodations: Law

ADA/Rehabilitation Act and Title IX

- Disability policy/benefits must include pregnancy and related conditions

- Requires reasonable accommodations for students and workers with pregnancy-related impairments
Pregnancy Accommodations

What is the practice on accommodations?
40% of postdoc mothers requested accommodations:

32% of university funded postdocs
45% of postdocs funded by other sources
“You know not to ask in this environment because you may lose projects or because of retaliation.”

Postdoc Mother in Biomedical Science
40% of postdoc mothers requested accommodations:

- 32% of university funded postdocs
- 45% of postdocs funded by other sources

93% of requests were approved.
“I also did not go out on a boat for one research cruise while 8 months pregnant. My [institution] supervisor was NOT supportive of this decision, though the ship captain had decided that he would not take me, and I had arranged for a substitute.”
A Tale of Two Postdocs

“Some people in the lab were not very supportive and went on using dangerous chemicals around me without taking the appropriate precautions.”

“Colleagues informed me of work that was going to be done near me so I could decide if I was comfortable being around it. Colleagues did a lot of lifting and other duties for me, such as standing on stools or ladders...”
Parental Leave

What is the law on leave?
# Maternity Leave: The Law on Leave

## For Trainees
- Title IX governs
- Leave for at least “as long as medically necessary” or,
- Leave given to others with temporary disability

## For Employees
- Title IX or Title VII governs
- Leave for “reasonable period of time” (Title IX) or,
- Leave given to others with temporary disability (Title IX and Title VII)

For eligible employees:
- FMLA 12 weeks of leave
- State protections

For either:
No penalty, retribution, or threats of retribution for taking leave
*Title IX (trainees and employees), Title VII (employees), FMLA (eligible employees), ADA/Section 504*
12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected, time off for eligible employees. May be taken intermittently with permission.

Eligible Employees:
• Have worked for the employer for at least 12 months (need not be consecutive).
• Have worked at least 1250 hours in the last 12 months.
• Have not used their 12 weeks for the year.
• Must be taken within 12 months of welcoming new child (for baby bonding).
Paternity Leave: The Law on Leave

For Trainees
- No discrimination

For Employees
- No discrimination (Title IX, Title VII)
- For eligible employees:
  - FMLA 12 weeks of leave
  - State protections

For either:
No penalty, retribution, or threats of retribution for taking leave related to sex stereotyping Title IX (trainees and employees), Title VII (employees), or for taking FMLA (eligible employees).
Parental Leave

What does leave look like in practice?
Maternity Leave: Practice

- No Paid Maternity Leave
- No Paid Time Off
- No Time Off of Any Kind

- Inst. Employee
- Inst. Trainee
- Ind. Funded
- Ext. Funded

Pregnancy, Parenting, and Postdocs
“I felt guilty/like I was putting my advisor out by taking extra time. If there was an official policy for leave or unpaid leave while keeping insurance, I would have taken more time to recover.”
“There is no such thing a[s] leave for fathers. They won't even allow use of sick leave. My personal boss is great about family matters, but the University strongly discourages leave for fathers and what retributions you suffer for taking time off is up to your supervisor.”

Postdoc Father
Who asks for leave?

- 91% of white postdocs
- 84% of Asian postdocs
- 80% of URM postdocs
Maternity Leave: In Practice

What is the response to leave request?

Response of the PI to postdoc taking/requesting maternity leave

- Discouraged Leave
- Neutral/No Impact
- Encouraged Leave

URM  | Asian  | White
--- | --- | ---
0%  | 10%  | 20%
10% | 20%  | 30%
20% | 30%  | 40%
30% | 40%  | 50%
40% | 50%  | 60%
50% | 60%  | 70%
60% | 70%  | 80%

Pregnancy, Parenting, and Postdocs
“He visited me at the hospital and said ‘So what about 2-3 weeks and you will be back?’”

Postdoc Biologist
“my boss said that he had no more funding and said so sorry about that. [...] I was actually fired and could not come back after the delivery.”
Who asks for and is granted leave?

- Seeking leave:
  - White: 60%
  - Asian: 36%
  - URM: 50%

- Granted leave:
  - White: 95%
  - Asian: 88%
  - URM: 94%
“Departmental personnel have been known in the past to use open threats to prevent leave” said another father. “While official rules are in accordance with the law at the departmental level and below they are completely flaunted.”

Postdoc Father
Institutional Supports: Childcare

How does childcare accessibility impact the postdoc experience?
29% of postdocs reported being eligible for on campus childcare
6% reported having access to some form of childcare funding assistance
“Well over 75% of my NIH-level salary went to pay childcare expenses. This is outrageous, and it's really no mystery why so many mothers in biology quit.”

“A child care subsidy would be a nice gesture. Currently, to put my child in the university daycare would cost 90% of my take home salary.”
40% requested flexible schedules

26% requested occasional work from home

Without the family-friendly accommodations, an engineer would “strongly consider leaving”, a neuroscientist “would not have been able to continue” and a biochemist “would just have to quit.”
Lactation Accommodations

Title IX:
- For medical necessity; and,
- To ensure equal opportunity

Title VII:
- To ensure equality (look for a comparator)

FLSA eligible (overtime eligible) postdocs: Must be provided a space, free-from intrusion, that is not a bathroom.

Must be provided with breaks, as needed.
Institutional Supports: PI Response

What was the PI response to postdocs’ new parenthood, and how did it impact the appointment?
“[PI] prematurely withdrew funding from my contracted position to fund another postdoc soon after I returned from work. To this day, he continues to refer to my children as my "constraints."”

“My PI's response made me feel like I could stay in science while having a family. He told me I could, over and over again; even when I doubted myself”
Characterized PI Response as “Unsupportive”

- Men
  - White
  - Asian
  - URM

- Women
  - White
  - Asian
  - URM
PI Response: Overall Impact

Negative Impact of PI on Overall Experience

- Men: 20% White, 25% Asian, 30% URM
- Women: 25% White, 20% Asian, 15% URM
Recommendations

Institutional Actions
Create and promote policies

- ...on health accommodations
- ...on schedule flexibility
- ...on clock extensions
- Provide paid leave to postdoc parents separate or in addition to paid sick or vacation leave.
Create Policies: Leave Basics

• At least 12 weeks of job-protected leave, with extensions for medical necessity.
• Include all parents regardless of funding source.
• Explicitly include fathers or other non-birth parents.
• Require parents to provide notification of the intent to take leave, but not request permission.
Know: POLICIES ALONE AREN’T ENOUGH!

• Well advertised explanations of benefits for all levels of scholars
• A high level administrator responsible for disseminating and enforcing the policies
• Training (particularly HR and PIs)
• Treat policies as entitlements, not requests
Support childcare

**Best:**
On-campus childcare at reasonable prices, on reasonable timetable

**Middle Ground:**
Childcare subsidies or grants

**Baseline:**
Dependent care FSA
Enrollment in emergency childcare service
Keep Metrics

Conduct a regular census of the postdoc population at your institution at the department level, including gender, race, time in position, and parental status.

Use the census to identify trends in postdoc attrition.
Recommendations

For Postdocs: Do Your Research!
Before accepting an appointment:

- Request information on institutional and funder leave policies
- Research childcare options
- Ask around—what is the PI's reputation?
- Identify colleagues—are there women in the lab? Are there parents? How long have they been there?
When expecting a child:

- Request information on leave policies from the responsible office, including paperwork requirements
- Identify funding opportunities
- Sign up for childcare waitlists ASAP
- Make a plan for alternate childcare
- Make a plan for revised schedule
- Know your rights BEFORE you engage
Managing PI Relationship

1. Have a plan for expected, best, and worst case scenario
2. Stress your commitment AND preparation, and build their faith in the plan
3. Follow up on conversations with written notes, emails
4. Use your PDO, HR, or funder as a resource. Title IX office, if necessary.
5. Track your progress
6. Don’t give in to guilt!
7. Trust your gut
Recommendations

Your Ideas?
Resources

- Guides for faculty and administrators
- Best Practice examples
- Funder information
- Guides for postdocs and students
- Full postdoc parents report—April 2017!

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