

Compatibility of work and care duties in women's academic careers: a qualitative survey among FWF Elise Richter fellows

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Figure 1, generated via Wortwolken.com

Content

Present state of evidence	3
Method	6
Results	7
Does one have to have children to hold expertise on the compatibility of academic careers and care work?	7
Child-care facilities	8
Mobility as an academic sine-qua-non.....	9
Academic workload	10
Timing in academia.....	11
Money, money, money	13
Home office and flexible timing	14
Contracts in academia	15
For mother-academics, it's far beyond excellence	15
Networking and academic role models.....	16
Institutional ignorance in academia	17
Stigmas: "bad mothers", "burdensome employees", "burdened mothers"	18
List of references	21

Present state of evidence

In scholarly literature from higher education research broadly speaking several mixed methods studies cover the theme of this survey, although most of the literature and data cover female academics more generally rather than mother-academics.¹ Before delving into the results of our own mini-project, we want to present three of these studies that we see as especially informative for the issue at hand: one big-scale study conducted in the first decades of the new millennium US and another two smaller projects conducted more recently in Austria and Norway. We also add some data from Statistics Austria and Medical University Vienna to enrich the picture.

In *“Do Babies Matter? Gender and Family in the Ivory Tower”* Mason and colleagues (2013) present results from a US research project investigating the effect of family formation on the academic careers of both men and women as well as the effect of career on family formation for over a decade. Analyses were based on data from the US Survey of Doctorate Recipients (SDR), an ongoing biennial longitudinal survey tracking more than 160,000 Ph.Ds. across the disciplines throughout their careers, until age 76 from 1973 onwards. They found that “women who had children within five years of receiving their Ph.D. were much less likely than men with early babies to acquire tenured professorships” across all disciplines and across different types of institutions (from liberal arts colleges to major research universities). According to their data, e.g., in the natural sciences, women who were both married and the parents of young children were 35 percent less likely to get tenure-track jobs compared with their male equivalents and 33 percent less likely to get jobs compared with unmarried women without young children. In the literature, this effect is widely discussed as “motherhood penalty”. In comparison, having older children could even be a plus: “based on data that include the humanities, mothers with older children, irrespective of marital status, are 11 percent more likely to secure tenure-track employment than are childless women” (Mason et al. 2013: 29).

Mason and colleagues also found a “familial gap” between men and women professors that was far larger than the career gap: “only one in three women who takes a tenure- track university job before having a child ever becomes a mother, and women who obtain tenure are more than twice as likely as their male colleagues to be single twelve years after earning their Ph.D. Women are also much more likely to be divorced than men in similar career circumstances.” (Mason et al. 2013: 2-3) Several studies also confirm that female scientist are much more likely to regret not having children (numbers ranging from 38 to 45 % among women, but only 18 to 25 % among men, Williams and Ceci 2012).

Snickare and Holter (2022) in a publication on *“gender-equal imbalance”* draw on a study of Norwegian elite professions (Halrynjo, 2017; Halrynjo & Lyng, 2017) that “shows that even the most gender-equality oriented couples can experience sliding back into a traditional gendered pattern.” They summarise based on their own findings that “when mothers, to a much larger extent than fathers, take extended parental leave they risk losing momentum, while at the same time showing clearly that they are replaceable. Others can and must take over their tasks, customers, and projects. On the other hand, fathers in professional careers often find ways that allow them to adapt and postpone their leave without losing customers and investment opportunities.” Or, in other words. “While the fathers can continue to be irreplaceable at work, the mothers become irreplaceable at home” (Snickare & Holter 2022: 46).

¹ Moreover, a great part of available research stems from the early 2000s and from other national contexts; it might thus be outdated or might not fully apply to the Austrian context.

This finding fits with statistical data which show, e.g. for Austria, that roughly 50% of parents with a child younger than 15 years follow the model of ‘full-time employment of father and part-time employment of mother’, while less than 1.5% follow the opposite model (‘full-time employment of mother and part-time employment of father’, cp. Table 1). It would certainly be interesting to also have robust data on the specific situation within Austrian academia. As for now, we can safely assume that many father-academics, while working full-time themselves, will have a female partner who is only part-time employed and keeps family and household running, whereas mother-academics won’t have the same support, with their partners being full-time employed and – as is normal in academia – working the extra hour and doing a lot of travelling. Their partners won’t be as likely to step in when the children fall ill or the schools are closed. Hence, although we will sometimes speak about parent-academics more generally in this report, it is important to keep in mind that gender roles differ statistically and so does the average burden of father-academics and mother-academics.

Table 1: F4 Paare mit Kindern unter 18 Jahren nach Merkmalen der Erwerbstätigkeit (ILO) und Alter des jüngsten Kindes – Jahresdurchschnitt 2024

Q: STATISTIK AUSTRIA, Mikrozensus-Arbeitskräfteerhebung 2024, Jahresdurchschnitt über alle Wochen. – Die hier verwendete Definition von Familie entspricht dem Kernfamilien-Konzept. Dieser Familienbegriff umfasst damit grundsätzlich nur im selben Haushalt lebende Personen. – Erwerbstätigkeit nach ILO-Konzept. – Vollzeit/Teilzeit nach Selbstzuordnung. – () Werte mit weniger als hochgerechnet 6 000 Haushalten sind sehr stark zufallsbehaftet. – (x) Werte mit weniger als hochgerechnet 3 000 Haushalten sind statistisch nicht interpretierbar.
Couples with children under 18 years by characteristics of employment (ILO) and age of youngest child

Merkmale der Erwerbstätigkeit	Gesamt	Alter des jüngsten Kindes (vollendete Jahre)					
		0-2	3-5	6-9	10-14	15-17	unter 15 zus.
in 1 000							
Paare mit Kindern insgesamt	794,7	209,9	152,9	157,9	175,4	98,7	696,1
Beide Vollzeit	124,2	14,5	14,4	21,8	42,4	31,0	93,2
Beide Teilzeit	28,4	(5,1)	7,1	6,2	(5,8)	(4,1)	24,2
Beide nicht erwerbstätig	32,8	11,3	6,8	6,9	(5,9)	(x)	30,9
Nur Mann erwerbstätig	121,2	47,7	25,7	19,6	18,2	10,0	111,2
Vollzeit	109,6	43,9	22,9	17,9	16,2	8,7	100,8
Teilzeit	11,6	(3,8)	(x)	(x)	(x)	(x)	10,4
Nur Frau erwerbstätig	35,8	(4,0)	(5,7)	8,4	9,7	7,9	27,9
Vollzeit	12,1	(x)	(x)	(3,0)	(3,5)	(x)	9,2
Teilzeit	23,7	(x)	(4,4)	(5,4)	6,2	(5,1)	18,7
Mann Vollzeit/ Frau Teilzeit	380,5	64,5	90,5	92,2	91,2	41,9	338,5
Frau Vollzeit/ Mann Teilzeit	11,2	(x)	(x)	(x)	(x)	(x)	9,5
Mann oder Frau in Elternkarenz	60,7	60,7	-	-	-	-	60,7
in %							
Paare mit Kindern insgesamt	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Beide Vollzeit	15,6	6,9	9,4	13,8	24,2	31,5	13,4
Beide Teilzeit	3,6	(2,4)	4,6	3,9	(3,3)	(4,2)	3,5
Beide nicht erwerbstätig	4,1	5,4	4,5	4,4	(3,4)	(x)	4,4
Nur Mann erwerbstätig	15,2	22,7	16,8	12,4	10,4	10,1	16,0
Vollzeit	13,8	20,9	15,0	11,3	9,2	8,9	14,5
Teilzeit	1,5	(1,8)	(x)	(x)	(x)	(x)	1,5
Nur Frau erwerbstätig	4,5	(1,9)	(3,8)	5,3	5,5	8,0	4,0
Vollzeit	1,5	(x)	(x)	(1,9)	(2,0)	(x)	1,3
Teilzeit	3,0	(x)	(2,9)	(3,4)	3,5	(5,1)	2,7
Mann Vollzeit/ Frau Teilzeit	47,9	30,7	59,2	58,4	52,0	42,5	48,6
Frau Vollzeit/ Mann Teilzeit	1,4	(x)	(x)	(x)	(x)	(x)	1,4
Mann oder Frau in Elternkarenz	7,6	28,9	-	-	-	-	8,7

Although data on mother-academics in Austria are generally meagre, there are a few exceptions. Berghammer et al. (2016) report research findings from a project on “*childlessness intentions of young female researchers in Austria*”. They follow-up on previous research results (for Austria:

Buchholz 2004 and Fieder et al. 2005) that have shown that female researchers in Austria stay childless to a relatively high degree, namely to around 45%. They also report that for the general scientific community, childlessness in female academics is most pronounced in the social sciences, less so in the humanities and least frequent in the natural sciences (Neyer 2009). Their own results are based on a survey of 196 female researchers in Austria, mostly between 25 and 34, and indicate that few young, childless researchers actually plan a life without children: “Only 7% intend to stay childless and most of them want to have two children (66%).” (Berghammer et al. 2016: 267). They also find that not only do female academics exhibit a relatively high degree of childlessness, but they also shift childbearing to later reproductive ages more often than other cohorts. They conclude that “when supporting women in their scientific careers and, in particular, reaching high status positions, the issue of realizing one’s family desires is of primary importance. Having children is a key component of a person’s life plan; one that is not easily abandoned. If young female researchers rate their chances of realizing their intentions while still performing well in their job as low, they will continue to drop out of research. Others will give up on their childbearing plans” (ibid.: 282).

Another source for data on mother-academics in Austria is the annual “Gleichstellungsbericht” of the Medical University of Vienna, that provides data on the relative prevalence of scientific staff female and male and with and without children along four different career stages. The numbers speak for themselves:

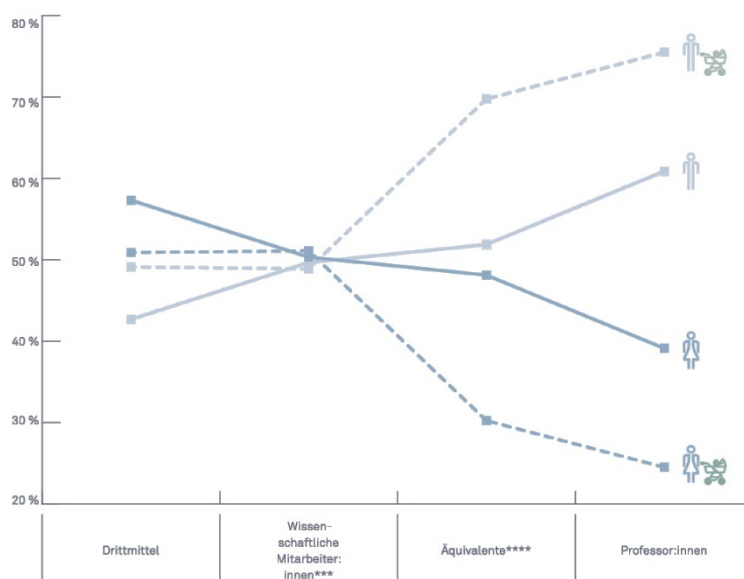


Figure 2: Leaky Pipeline: comparison of men and women with and without children (Medizinische Universität Wien 2024: 39)

The University of Vienna, on the other hand, states that there are no data on the number of children of their employees, thus rendering any relating quantitative analyses impossible.

Method

A qualitative questionnaire was sent out August 14th 2025 to the ERN mailing list with 263 participants, all of which are female senior-post-doc academics working on or having finished their habilitation (*venia docendi*). We collected 18 responses until August 20th 2025. This corresponds to a response rate of 6.8% within 6 days during holiday season. A 19th input was provided after the first version of this report had been shared within the network.

Guiding questions / prompts of our survey:

- How are academic careers (not) compatible with family / care duties?
- What are the major shortcomings of the current situation?
- What drives these shortcomings?
- What are the major upsides? What allows for these?
- What could improve the current situation?
- What are meaningful measures you experienced at Austrian institutions or elsewhere?
- Any further thoughts?

Results were analysed along an empirically grounded approach: central issues raised in responses were collected and scrutinized. Due to time restrictions, no further in-depth analysis, linking results to secondary literature, was undertaken.

Original quotes are provided for each issue. German responses were translated into English, while references to German labels in English responses such as 'Karenz' or 'Hort' were left untranslated, denoting how in everyday practical life such local labels with very local meaning make it into English speaker's vocabulary.

Based on the qualitative character of this survey and the small number of responses, the representativity of the results is difficult to assess. We will thus refrain from drawing any strict conclusions and rather formulate some hypotheses that warrant further research.

We also want to stress that important research has already been undertaken regarding the theme of this mini-project (cp. the examples presented above). And, as one respondent stressed, "any study that talks about the 'leaky pipeline' that I've heard about so far got the problem right." Hence, a lack of evidence and scholarly discussion might in most respects not be the most pressing issue.

Our survey's respondents stem from various fields (humanities 5, social sciences 3, life sciences 3, physics 3, human / veterinary medicine 2, arts 1, others 1) and institutions (ÖAW 4, U of Vienna 2, JKU, Med Uni Vienna, Med Uni Graz, VetMed Vienna, Angewandte, Bildende, U Graz, MPL, TU Vienna 2, Univ Krems 2, UIBK).

In accordance with the theme of the survey, it shall also be noted here that this whole mini-project has been conducted unpaid during evenings and weekends.

Results

Does one have to have children to hold expertise on the compatibility of academic careers and care work?

"I would really like to contribute to this survey, but I do not have any personal experiences with this issue. Maybe this applies to others, too, and you will get only a handful of responses." (R1)

"Thanks for sending this. In any case I don't have any family/care duties so don't have any experiences to contribute." (R4)

Having a family was unfortunately never at the table for me (we are both academics). (R10)

Some respondents and non-respondents (leaving a short explanation why they did not answer the questionnaire) voiced that they could not share any insights because they had no children. At first glance, this may seem as a straight forward logical reaction. But, when compared to other responses, one can see the assumptions implicated by such a reaction: one other respondent states that she didn't have any children on her own but had some perspective on the matter because some of her students did.

"I must confess I ignored the survey the first time you sent it, because I do not have children and therefore did not feel like I have anything to contribute to. However, I coordinate a female in a researchers' network, and I know from them, that ..." (R2)

Another respondent states that she didn't have children; but that she was reminded that some time before in her career her mother needed to be cared for. She thus acknowledged that care work was not restricted to being a parent.

I did not fulfil my care-duties regarding my late mother as well as I would have wanted to due to my working situation and career affordances. I regret this in hindsight. (R10)

Yet another respondent, this one with children, states that

"People with kids have to pretend to not have kids, in order to be respected at work, at least that's my experience in Austria. In Sweden it was different, everyone left the office at 5pm, it was rather weird if someone would stay longer, everyone was expected to have "a life". It was expected that someone would have someone to take care of." (R 13)

Thus, at least three issues come up:

First, that *care work seems to be handled as a very personal, private matter in academia*, with parents holding all the expertise, responsibility, joy and burden of parenting, while non-parents see themselves rather as uninvolved by-standers, in an utterly different situation, potentially sad to not have children on their own. Female academics also have to struggle with two sets of expectations in parallel: that of aligning with a male, non-parent stereotype as well as that of being a 'good mother'. This can make up for constant disappointments and *a fairly fragmenting force* in academic teams. One can also find some hints at this thesis in the literature.

Second, that some academics *regret not having children* or have them later than preferred and connect this to academic career affordances. This thesis is supported by robust evidence from larger research projects.

My first child was born during my Elise-Richter-Stipend, my second one when I had just secured a tenure track position. I view both of my children as a product of a situation where I had some sort of

job security for once, after years of term-limited post doc-ing. Also, I'm a 'very' old mother - had both my kids after age 42. The typically nomadic life style early on and precarious job situation are in my opinion very detrimental to having children as a woman in academia at all. (R 17)

Third, *care work beyond parenting* seems to be an issue with very low awareness and/or prevalence among academics. Maybe the researched group of academics (late post-docs) not yet in an age where their parents needed care, or, caring for parents being generally the exemption rather the rule. Taking care for partners or parents is an issue we did not see raised in existing literature.

Child-care facilities

Having access to child-care facilities and services is one of the themes most frequently addressed by the respondents. It should ideally be provided full-time, high quality and locally, be affordable and have enough capacity so that future parents can plan on it. Some respondents have direct or indirect experience how such an infrastructure can serve as a real game changer for academic mothers (or families, more generally). Overall, the situation seems to differ a lot between academic organisations.

"Currently, we have only one childcare service at the [organisation] located on the campus in the north part of the city of [X]. However, the faculty of [field] is located down-town and is divided into two campus and there is no childcare service located in any of these two locations. So, for some of our researchers it is really challenging to have to travel to the [X] Campus to leave their children in the morning and then have to pick them up at 15 hours at the latest. The opening times of the childcare service are also not very flexible. I think that offering reliable and full-time childcare in Austria would already benefit most of female researchers." (R2)

"The university provides a drop-in child care facility which sounds great, but I have heard it is not always so practical as there are capacity issues but I don't want to be sceptical at this stage!" (R7)

"I hear from colleagues -mothers and dads- that the [campus] kindergarten is fabulous. The care is high quality and opening hours are really amazing-they also provide a crib. But I am convinced there is more need on other sites / locations with scientific institutions. This could serve as a role model. When I compare this to the situation I was in—this is a major step forward and a huge improvement. I also hear that this Kindergarden is subsidised and rather inexpensive for what it offers." (R9)

"Overall, availability of child care that allows for working fulltime is essential." (R 12)

"Flexible and high-quality childcare on campus (with long opening hours) + Flying Nannies [I experienced as most helpful]." (R 12)

"Many places had kind of nice day care, but only at certain hours, on certain days or only during the time when students had lectures, not during school vacation. Some kindergartens are always open, but have changing pedagogues in the summertime, that have no time for developing a bond with the kids. So ideally the day care has several pedagogues employed, who maintain a close bond with the child all year round and will take their vacation at different times in the year, so that children whose caregivers or parents need to work, still have got a at least one pedagogue to who they have a stable relationship, that they know and trust. Ideally things like children's summer academy (Kinderuni), generally a really great thing, would also be more convenient, if courses would span over two weeks and have regular hours at the same site." (R 13)

"Of course, breast feeding is only possible, if the kindergarten or day-care is within the university building. Or at least really close to reach in a couple of minutes." (R 13)

"[University] childcare offers are quite good, but (at least several years ago) had limited capacity. great [University] childcare." (R 15)

"Limited childcare capacity at institutions; if you cannot get a spot there, it gets more difficult - although in Vienna, childcare is still great compared to elsewhere in Austria (I'm now commuting from Lower Austria)." (R 15)

"[We need] more high-quality childcare options." (R 15)

"Child care like the situation described at [campus] sounds wonderfully helpful. What would also be helpful is additional care options for when children are sick and can't be sent into child care." (R 17)

"The [University] has a kindergarden and provides childcare for employees but I heard that it is difficult to get it , especially full time. I don't know anything about the costs and the quality. I know from others that the nursery/kindergarden at the VBC is way better and subsidised." (R 18)

"For me the biggest challenge was that where I live in lower Austria, child care is very limited in both the opening hours (closed at 1pm when my son was little and now it closes at 3pm) and availability. Improving the child care situation would tremendously improve the situation for female scientists. Also subsidising private childcare would help a lot." (R 18)

Mobility as an academic sine-qua-non

In current academia, mobility is seen as a sine-qua-non in many respects. It counts as a central asset of individual CV's and it allows for more coherent careers when research positions are limited in quantity and time-wise (taking any opportunity worldwide). Mobility is also central when it comes to conferencing, to research consortia meetings and to job interviews. With care-duties, however, the additional strain of living up to such expectations can become extremely exhausting – physically, emotionally, economically and relationship-wise. It is thus no wonder, that mobility figured as another central issue among respondents. Responses also show a certain level of ignorance concerning care obligations and the extra complications and limitations they come with by many actors involved.

"The internationalisation of the academic market puts pressure on academics. Academics who live abroad have less local support network and it is most problematic when deadlines have to be met and that extra care support (as when children are sick) are need or during parental leave." (R3)

"I did my first interview for a tenure track job online because I had a small baby and could not travel overseas for just 3 days. I ended caring for my baby during the day, again working at night and even doing the interview at night because of jet lag. I had no support whatsoever and the university interviewing me never even asked about my situation which clearly disadvantaged me." (R3)

"International travels are also made difficult and have a non-negligible financial impact when one has to move with the family to conduct extensive visiting research stays or do fieldwork. Otherwise, having to « fly in » family to take over the grand children for longer periods (like a month) is also extremely expensive (though it is of course cheaper than a 24h and 7/7 nanny)." (R3)

"I currently see offers for fellowships of less than one year and for a stay abroad that pretend to be inclusive because they propose to support the successful applicant to find a kindergarden or school for the children - I think the administrative, financial and personal burden this would imply is simply overlooked." (R3)

"High international mobility (often required for success in academia) is often impossible for parents, especially in the early phase after the PhD – for example many mobility schemes do not include extra

funding to cover child care abroad or to have their partners accompany them (the mobility scheme I did in [city] after my PhD did for example did not provide for that [link to mobility scheme].” (R 12)

“Our main issue is the fact that my husband also has a career which is incompatible with my jobs' requirements of moving around the globe until I may get a tenured position somewhere in the globe. And, he also does not want to travel around since he is from the US and he has already moved with me to Vienna. So, I think double careers are incredibly hard to pull off, even if the partner is also involved in child care.” (R 14)

“Additionally, moving around the globe is also not optimal for the kids (I do not buy the narrative that it is good for the kids to be exposed - I can also argue against this as a psychologist) not only because they would have to learn a new language every time (with incredibly varying school systems and I cannot even help them with their studies) but I do not believe that it supports their well-being. Making friends, getting integrated, losing friends, knowing that they will have to give up all these, etc. Not to mention the fact that a lack of friends, family, and support network that helps you in your everyday life when things (illness, travelling, and all sorts of obligations) emerge. So, I think, no matter what age your kids are, motherhood (as I think is good for the kids to develop solid fundamentals and resilience, basically just be there and have we predictable conditions and time when the kids need not when I have it) and academic career as it is expected in my field are barely compatible. This notwithstanding, the female career programs from FWF are of great help, but the issue is very broad, far-reaching, and impacts the first 16-18 years of the kids' lives, and not to mention how it strains the relationship with the kids, partners, and other family members.” (R 14)

“It's difficult to arrange for additional care upon conference travel, so I have limited my travels and radius, which is also detrimental career-wise.” (R 17)

Academic workload

Another central issue in academia is the overall workload. The general idea that science was a vocation, mixed with a highly competitive research regime and multiplying missions and tasks, comes with an expectation that there is no such thing as a life outside one's scientific endeavours. As a consequence, workloads seem to be without bounds. For healthy, young academics without care-duties, this might even be enticing, but as soon as children are born (or planned), one starts wondering: how can one lead two lives in one? The stories reflecting this issue, are maybe the most colourful ones, allowing some glimpses into the everyday life of academic mothers (and, possibly, fathers, too). They also refer to other issues, like mobility or employment conditions.

“I wrote my first book at night during my first maternity leave, because I could not offer professionally to miss the deadline; I did my first interview for a tenure track job online because I had a young baby and could not travel overseas for just 3 days. I ended caring for my baby during the day, again working at night and even doing the interview at night because of jet lag.” (R3)

“The workload is incompatible: most young scientists I know work at least 25% over their paid hours to complete what is expected in terms of teaching, research, administration, outreach, third mission activities, and as these tasks are all additive taking on a requested additional task never entails giving up another one. In my opinion the expected extra commitment required under the assumption that I love what I do is unfair. particularly when trying to fund a family, I think the most incompatible thing about an academic career and family is the expectation (and need) to work longer hours than we are paid for.” (R7)

"In my situation, I have worked 10-12 hour days for the whole of my pregnancy in order to set things up for my absence during Karenz - there is a huge administrative load in preparing for a year of absence." (R7)

"The list of 'before you go on leave can you just ...' type of requests made the overtime burden during my pregnancy particularly pronounced." (R7)

"I also hear cases where staff are asked to do substantial work while on parental leave (e.g. preparing new courses) which I think is inexcusable as the employer is not paying for this time. In general, the mothers I spoke to on maternity leave that keep 1-2 hours contracts running in order to maintain their 3rd party funding and PhD students were regularly asked to do more than is reasonable for 1-2 hours/week work." (R7)

"In my case I am exploring if I can return to work part-time. While this is a legal right, it's very difficult to implement for an academic. For example, if I want to return to work at 50% (20h paid per week) I will have to do 4 hours of teaching per semester week, and as I am being asked to switch to teaching a different course this will need several hours of additional preparation in the first year and thereafter 1-2 hours of student and teaching admin in addition (not counting hours for grading). So, let's say in the first year I need at least 8 hours per semester week allocated to teaching, plus 2 hours per week to supervise my 2 PhD students, then I am at 10 hours per week before even adding any BSc/MSc students, admin tasks or even checking my email. One can easily see how working part time is almost impossible when my actual responsibilities also include running a research group of 12 people and administering an FWF and HEU project as well." (R7)

"My Arbeitsmedizin [doctor] stated no overtime and work from home as much as possible in the 3rd trimester, but there is no system to facilitate making that possible. It would require allocating extra administrative support for some hours per week to make the practical arrangements for handing work over for Karenz." (R7)

"In short, there is no practical way to implement the parental benefits applied diligently for 'allgemeines Personal' to 'wissenschaftliches Personal'. This is a real problem - e.g. how can my one-year maternity cover junior post-doc really take over the responsibilities of my job (research group leader, PhD supervision, managing my research projects, running my outreach projects etc.)?" (R7)

"Dominant working culture in academia of working over hours (more than fulltime) is often not compatible with care responsibilities. Related to the 'publish or perish' culture and the competition over the few stable academic positions." (R 12)

I'm still only working part-time, though, and wouldn't know how to square a full-time job with a two-year-old who is a bad sleeper (R 17)

Timing in academia

The issue of overburdening academic workloads is linked to the issue of timing. With a family to care for, not all hours each day are an option anymore. Or, if they have to be, the costs can be extremely high. Timing is crucial regarding at which hour during the day meetings are scheduled, whether there are breaks long enough to e.g. breast-feed, or for when in the year deadlines are set and conferences held (e.g. during school holidays or not).

With this issue there seems to be some variation between research institutes and research groups. Some working environments are aware of this issue and attend to it in a highly constructive way. Others seem to simply ignore it. Here, the historical case of the male academic persona with no care duties whatsoever, enjoying a rich social life within academia, including late evenings, is still the

norm against everyone seems to be measured, even if there is no intrinsic academic need to schedule meetings at 6pm rather than 2pm or deadlines for project proposals during school holidays. On the other hand, the potential time flexibility in academia is mentioned once as a (potential) plus as one can “start a bit later if needed and work a bit later to make up the hours.” (R7) More flexibility can also be achieved via online formats. Again, the actual implementation of this flexibility will depend on the group leader, institute director and/or head of organisation.

“Conferences and networking events are always taking place in the evening: when schools/kindergarten are closed. Institutions rarely offer babysitting options and even though, the toll it can have on the parents and children to go for a 3-hours evening after a whole day of work is clearly undermined. Because of this, I have been excluded from many networking events during my maternity leave and in the first years of my children’s lives.” (R3)

“With [project proposal] deadlines, schools’ holidays are not considered, although schools are also education institutions! The FWF has for example opened the ASTRA call on the 14th of July and closes it on 18 September, but because the submission process is administratively heavy, the project has to be submitted by mid-August: all the key people of my institute who need to upload and approve the application are in holiday either in July or in August!” (R3)

“[A real problem is the] incompatibility of school/kindergarten opening hours and time schedule of academic events.” (R3)

“Academic institutions should become more creative when it comes to organising networking events: 1) less is more; 2) mornings or lunch 3) bloc of events (to create bounds).” (R3)

“Actual reduction in workload for nursing / milk expressing employees and provision of easy-access and well-equipped nursing / pumping facilities [would improve the situation]; raising awareness that nursing / expressing milk reduces flexibility to schedule meetings.” (R 12)

“Respect colleagues’ working hours and time-off, and limit work activities (ideally for all employees) to times when formal care is available.” (R 12)

“[What would be helpful, are] flexible arrangements to address specific needs – for example more flexibility with regards to home office and working hours, more hybrid or online meetings/seminars which allow participation from home in case of care responsibilities (if so desired by person providing care); flexibility to reduce and increase working hours to see what works best.” (R 12)

“Also, the only way I could make it work in the first year was: 14 months Karenz, 50:50 shared with my husband (who is at the same university), officially me 7 months, then him - but unofficially whoever's work had lower priority at the moment took care of the kids. Most of the time that meant alternating days.” (R 15)

“More flexible arrangements regarding research funding interviews and job interviews when applicants are giving birth/on birth leave (ERC for example suggests postponement of ERC interview by 2-3 days in case of giving birth or alternatively evaluation without interview e.g.)”(R 12)

“Some funders do not require interviews for research funding (FWF) – this could be a possibility or more flexible arrangements to arrange alternative interview dates (e.g. NOW).” (R 12)

“It would be also fantastic if that would not be a taboo, that it would be no big thing that you want to breastfeed and that you might not be able to go to meetings after 7pm. As mentioned above I had a really great experience at [X] university in Sweden, where it was common to not do over hours, in solidarity with those who just cannot stay longer. It was also mandatory to join informal meetings in the mornings and early afternoons, instead of informal meetings in the evenings at the pub. I think

informal meetings among team members are very important for the success of a project or collaboration or even workplace climate, but they should not always involve alcohol and evening hours.” (R 13)

“[A problem are] long hours, conferences, talks in the evening time.” (R 16)

“What's not quite compatible is having meetings at all hours, especially in the afternoon, after Kindergarten/ school hours. I have invoked the U of Vienna Frauenförderungsplan once to ensure that I'm not scheduled for a meeting after 3pm. That worked, so there seems to be more awareness these days. So I'll just keep doing that.” (R 17)

“On the other hand, I have given up my position as elected faculty representative, as I am unable to attend the regular afternoon meetings at this point. I am also basically unable to join most job search and curricular committees for the same reason.” (R 17)

“What's also problematic career-wise is that I miss out on quite a lot of opportunities to schmooze and network, because I'm either working or putting the kids to bed in the evening. Not being able to put in overtime and make appearances anytime anywhere any day can set back a career. I do find myself out of the loop time and again.” (R 17)

“Another thought that I have is that it still happens that regular meetings within departments are scheduled after 5pm or early in the morning. This is not very family friendly.” (R 18)

Money, money, money ...

When it comes to extra resources that being an academic AND a mother require, not only time, but also money were most often mentioned in explicit terms, whereas emotional, relational and physical strain provided a constant ‘background noise’ in the responses.

Additional financial costs accrue from the need to organise for additional child care services during school holidays, late evenings (or even afternoons, if kindergartens close early), or when travelling abroad with or without children. They can also accrue from needing special assistance at work, as e.g. pregnant women are banned from the lab. Opinions differ as to who should provide extra-funding: one’s organisation, funding bodies via project budgets or even the ministry directly.

“Financial costs of extra care solutions to cope with a never stopping academic jobs/events/deadlines.” (R3)

“Financial costs of extra care responsibilities induced by international travels (conference AND fieldwork, visiting stays etc) should be taken care of by the institutions, not by the project budget.” (R3)

“Having day-care at conferences and/or allowing expenses for traveling with children and baby sitters etc. to be refundable through one's research funds [would be helpful].” (R 16)

“For colleagues working in ‘the wet sciences’ (with lab work, eg chemistry, biology, pharmacy etc...) it would be desirable to have financial resources (provided by the ministry) to employ technical support for mothers while being banned from the lab (either during pregnancy or breast feeding).” (R9)

“Obviously, our institute management should have known it was an option to have maternity hire, but they did not. This can be fixed with transparency and a clearly known statement that all parental leave qualifies for a replacement hire to maintain the educational and research capacity.” (R7)

Still, money cannot solve everything, and preferences also seem to differ among academic mothers. To get more clarity on this specific issue, a more systematic discussion seems necessary.

“[There is] some financial bonus for people with children, but I would rather do without and have inclusive work conditions.” (R3)

“The FWF has (I believe recently launched an initiative for SFBs-perhaps also other programs), with special funds for mothers and support for committee work for mothers. This initiative could be rolled out for all programs including standalone grants.” (R9)

FWF provides a “Kinderpauschale” for female project leaders who have children under 3 years and work fulltime – provides more financial flexibility to pay for additional (potentially private) childcare/babysitters and financial incentive to work fulltime.” (R 12)

“Since a couple of years, if you are on a global budget position, one can apply for a minimal wage employment from the [university] whilst being on maternity leave to stay connected to the lab/department or to continue teaching. This is really great! Unfortunately, only few employees know about this option. I’m not sure if it would be possible to get a similar employment from the FWF if the person on maternity leave was previously paid from an FWF grant. That would be great!” (R 18)

Home office and flexible timing

The academic regime has certainly changed during the past decades. Not only is the number of academics ever growing, so is the competition for jobs. New metrics now inform managerial universities and allow for systematic and more transparent steering, while also opening-up for new options of gaming the system and rendering academic identities somewhat ambiguous.

One of the more recent innovations is of a rather technical nature: online meeting software and other digital tools render working from home easier and – since Covid-19 lockdowns – more common. While home office is still not an option for most of academic teaching and practically all lab work, a lot of work can be done from home just as well as from university work places. This situation comes with positive effects for parent-academics. We do not have any robust data on what the concrete guidelines and rules at each academic organisation are and how these are implemented by institute directors and group leaders, but overall, responses were positive.

“Home office during holidays is relatively helpful for older children.” (R 3)

“What was very helpful for me was that my direct line manager accepted that I worked from home 2-3 days a week. Like this I could spend time with my little kids when day care was over, and work flexibly in the evening/night.” (R 13)

“[More] flexible arrangements to address specific needs [would be helpful] – for example more flexibility with regards to home office and working hours, more hybrid or online meetings/seminars which allow participation from home in case of care responsibilities (if so desired by person providing care).” (R 12)

Flexibility was not only called for as to working place (home or office), but also as to working hours. One has to keep in mind here that parents cannot know in detail what they embark on when getting children. With the first child, they enter totally new territory, having to explore their own approach and resourcefulness as well as that of their partners and their wider social networks. Also, each child is different; some sleep long hours while others seem to never close their eyes; one year they may be healthy all the time; the next winter, extra child care has to be arranged for practically every second

day because at least one child falls ill, cannot attend the kindergarten and needs extra attention during days and nights. One week, a child may stay-over at friends almost every day and parents will use this extra time to work long hours; another week, a child may need extra-input from their parents. As a result, parents have to be extremely flexible themselves, and they also need flexibility in their working environment. Given such flexibility, overall work performance and well-being can be much higher.

“Flexibility to reduce and increase working hours to see what works best [would be helpful].” (R 12)

“I expect the flexitime is the best advantage in comparison to other careers.” (R7)

“Flexible contract and project extensions for PIs in case of parental leave (FWF) [are most helpful].” (R 12)

Contracts in academia

A currently very prominent theme, not only among parent-academics, is the prevalence of temporary contracts in academia and the recent §109 regulation of the maximum length of such temporary contracts at one organisation. Parent-academics can have to face additional limitations in this respect, as Karenz-Zeit or part-time positions are often not exempted from the 8-years rule. Also, any hardship arising from the regulation can be felt twice as much with the parents’ more precarious working conditions and more responsibilities.

„As a consequence from the §109 regulation, I am now affiliated with three different institutions in parallel; But this is a folly we all have to live with [in present academia]. I am currently really struggling to survive academically.” (R 10)

“High job insecurity / precarity in academia / high percentage of short-term contracts (especially in the phase when women have children – 30s-40s) makes it often only compatible for female researchers to have a child who are more resilient towards taking risks and/or have a partner with a stable income.” (R 12)

“Fair contract extensions in case of parental leave [could improve the situation]. This should include contract extensions not only for PIs but also for project members employed on temporary contracts in research projects. Transparency that birth and parental leave will not affect the tenure clock [is of paramount importance] in qualification agreements.” (R12)

“To really improve the situation for academics (or families in general for that matter), more flexibility with parental leaves, including 50:50 options, would be needed. It is completely unrealistic for an Asst. Prof. to stop working for half a year. But this would need a systemic change of the Karenz.” (R 15)

“What I experienced as really meaningful support was that I was able to interrupt my Elise Richter grant to have my first child, and my job and money were waiting for me when I was ready to return. What was really unhelpful, to say the least, was that the University of Vienna counted my maternity leave toward the maximum time I had under Kettenvertragsregelung, so I was unable to return there and had to move my project to another institution at that point.” (R 17)

“Real breaks in academia should be possible!” (R3)

For mother-academics, it’s far beyond excellence

As a result of the multiple extra strain parent-academics, and foremost mother-academics, are faced with, the selection process is by far not based on academic excellence alone. While extraordinary

academic excellence is decisive to secure and keep a position while also parenting, mother-academics also have to be extremely stress-resistant, healthy, better have a supportive and flexible partner, rather live in a place with good child-care infrastructure, rather have some financial back-up. This situation is often addressed with the label of the 'glass ceiling' – the final career steps are often not an option for female academics with children. As shown above, this is not necessarily so; given adequate working conditions, ones that do not per se lower academic output in quality or quantity, it is possible to combine care-duties and academic excellence. In the best case, academics with children can even bring assets to the table others cannot. They have a lot of expertise on what it needs to make having children as an academic work and they also hold insights into real-life conditions that others don't but that might be relevant to do meaningful research and to connect to public needs. And, not least, having children can even be good for networking with other parent-academics as well as with non-academic parents.

"Establishing an academic career is possible with family care duties but it is very challenging." (R 18)

"[Parenting and academic work are] compatible when a lot of ifs are given: If working within a supportive and flexible work environment. If career progress is possible while working not more than fulltime. Personal but crucial: Having a supportive partner who shares care responsibilities at least equally and agrees to follow in case of international academic mobility or a job prospect abroad." (R 12)

"How are academic careers (not) compatible with family / care duties? They are compatible if you have either A) a grandma, a clan of allies, relatives, friends and a very deeply loving and committed partner, who help you bridge the long summer school vacation (9 weeks) and are also "good with kids" and live close to you. Or you B) are so lucky to be in one of the rare institutions that have got a kindergarten that does not close in the summer and offer child activities during the summer for school kids. I had the experience of a good kindergarten at [my university]. Or you C) have got a very lovely team of very flexible and tolerant colleagues who will all the time change their schedule to fit to yours (also last minute) and give you applause for the crazy workload you are handling." (R 13)

"Our main issue is the fact that my husband also has a career which is incompatible with my jobs' requirements of moving around the globe until I may get a tenured position somewhere in the globe. And, he also does not want to travel around since he is from [abroad] and he has already moved with me to Vienna. So, I think double careers are incredibly hard to pull off, even if the partner is also involved in child care." (R 14)

Networking and academic role models

Networking was not only mentioned as something one might be excluded from when meetings are scheduled in the evenings, but also as an asset for mother-academics. The latter mentions are certainly connected to the survey being conducted within a network of female scientists (the Elise Richter Network) and the awareness thus already being higher than average. But although there are formal networks for female scientists, networks for mother-scientists are ever only informal. Also, having to network again puts an extra strain on mother-academics with meagre time resources. Networking with female or mother-academics can further reduce networking time with other colleagues (male and/or without children), thus further fragmenting the academic community.

"What's also problematic career-wise is that I miss out on quite a lot of opportunities to schmooze and network, because I'm either working or putting the kids to bed in the evening. Not being able to put in overtime and make appearances anytime anywhere any day can set back a career. I do find myself out of the loop time and again." (R 17)

“Women’s networking (though these remain invisible to men, who could very much gain from it) [is a meaningful measure I experienced].” (R 3)

“[There are] visibly more female role models today in academia than one generation ago. [There are] informal support networks among academic mothers [which is a major upside].” (R 12)

“[We need] more networking among us women!” (R 16)

Institutional ignorance in academia

Ignorance of institutions, programmes, leaders and colleagues is certainly one central cause of many unnecessary strains for mother-academics. It is often perplexing how the working and living conditions of parenting academics are simply ignored in almost every respect. Or, in the words of one respondent: “Everything would be different if it were not the case that the academic world takes male roles as default, e.g., everyone is or should be free to work long after day-care closes.” (R 16) You will see below, that maybe the most statements related to such ignorance.

Often, raising concerns does help and calls for changing practices are taken up locally and in a specific situation, but this almost never happens by default. Having to constantly raise concerns means that one has to be vigilant all the time and that one will be identified with this role in the long run by others. Also, reinventing the wheel anew in every situation is extremely inefficient. Certainly, the situation would change if more mother-academics were at decisive positions. But it could also change, if the standard procedures changed within academic organisations.

Respondents also pointed us to one initiative at Utrecht university, that addresses the extra-burden of parent-academics, namely the “Sleepless in Academia” initiative², to one piece in Times Higher Education that addresses how the needs of pregnant researchers and new parents are ignored when it comes to job interviews³ and to one funding body that offers a ‘Compensation Scheme for Parental Leave Scheme’ as well as a ‘Force Majeure Extension Scheme’, so that when “during an application process or during the course of a project, you are prevented from providing the required input (such as your application, rebuttal, interview or report) within the allotted time, you may be able to take recourse to [this scheme]” (see respective homepage⁴).

“I had no support whatsoever and the university interviewing me never even asked about my situation which clearly disadvantaged me.” (R3)

“I currently see offers for fellowships of less than one year and for a stay abroad that pretend to be inclusive because they propose to support the successful applicant to find a kindergarten or school for the children - I think the administrative, financial and personal burden this would imply is simply overlooked.” (R3)

“I had to arrange hiring my own replacement and for replacement supervisors for my PhD students and my research group.” (R3)

“What I would want is for my management team to take over the administration of reassigning my responsibilities to other staff members and for leading the process of hiring a replacement.” (R7)

² <https://www.uu.nl/en/research/utrecht-young-academy/sleepless-in-academia-responding-to-new-academic-parents-challenges> (accessed 24 August 2025).

³ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/offer-pregnant-applicants-more-flexibility-research-funders-told> (accessed 24 August 2025).

⁴ <https://www.nwo.nl/en/force-majeure-extension-scheme> (accessed 24 August 2025).

“Obviously, our institute management should have known it was an option to have maternity hire, but they did not.” (R7)

“I think we are expected to self-manage our additional load beyond teaching being adjusted pro rate, but it would be a great advantage for that to be formalised in terms of reduction of admin, administrative support for running projects, supervision of students shared with co-supervisors. As it is I am having to arrange all that myself, and I would appreciate it being systematized.” (R7)

“There was no support or clear guidance on how to do this so it involves a lot of calls and dead ends and yet hundreds of women must have had to do it before me so I don't know why there isn't a system in place to support this transition.” (R7)

“[We need] transparency on maternity leave cover availability.” (R7)

“Administrative assistance in preparing a high quality of hand over of management roles to replacement hires during karenz [could improve the current situation].” (R7)

“Clarity and agreement on what if any work is going to be done during karenz [could improve the current situation].” (R7)

“Formal strategy to reduce workload if Elternteilzeit is requested or desired [could improve the current situation]. At present beyond the teaching element of the workload (generally taken to be 1/3 of the workload of an academic) there is no system at my institution that stipulates that mothers can reduce their admin/research responsibilities (or have additional support staff) to accommodate the legal right to part time work.” (R7)

“Right now, there are ‘self-knitted’ initiatives at institutions. It would be great if there were a fund that mothers could apply for.” (R9)

“There is plenty legal provision for protection of family rights and I think university implement it well and diligently for support and administrative staff but there needs to be a reassessment of what academic parents really need to make the workload manageable enough to actually allow them to take up these legal rights. I suspect that on an individual level there is a lot one can fight for, but if this were clearly systematised, and applied equally to all, it would be a better support for parents with scientific roles.” (R7)

“[There is a] need for unofficial work-arounds (which are not possible for many women). the only way I could make it work in the first year was: 14 months Karenz, 50:50 shared with my husband (also at TUW), officially me 7 months, then him - but unofficially whoever's work had lower priority at the moment took care of the kids. Most of the time that meant alternating days.” (R 15)

“The problem is that one tries to be kind and flexible for people with children, instead of creating inclusive rules than can apply to all. A summer break should not be just for the people with children - all researchers should have equal opportunities to submit a major application outside of the summer break for example.” (R3)

Moreover, ignorance can also come from another direction. Child-care facilities and whole child-care systems can prove ignorant of working parents’ needs. It is then up to the parents to negotiate these various ends that don’t meet and to find ad-hoc solutions that both institutions involved will at least tolerate.

“My son will have to change kindergartens in September and go through the so-called ‘adaptation phase.’ This phase is standard practice in Austria, but it is neither officially recognized by the Ministry of Education nor by employers. While I strongly believe that the concept itself is valuable—making

the transition softer for children, and in many ways also for parents—it comes with hidden administrative consequences that are rarely discussed. In practice, it often means parents need additional days off work. In my case, the kindergarten team told me they might change my son's contract to half-days if they feel he does not adapt well, even though he has already attended kindergarten full-time for three years. With a 40-hour befristet contract, this would be impossible for me. Working part-time is not an option either, as I am expected to deliver the same workload while also trying to secure a permanent position. experienced the same challenges with my daughter five years ago, when the situation was incredibly stressful and my support network very limited. Now, once again, I will have to ask my supervisors for "flexibility." But in practice, this flexibility means I will not be able to work regular hours, I will miss out on institute life and networking opportunities, and I will once again be pushed to the margins of my professional environment. (...) Employers should be required to recognize the adaptation phase and grant parents additional leave for it, much like *Pflegeurlaub* (care leave). Unless this phase is formally regulated, families, and especially mothers, will continue to carry the hidden costs of a system that should benefit society as a whole." (R 19)

Stigma: "bad mothers", "burdensome employees", "burdened mothers"

Last but not least, mother-academics seem to face a plurality of potential stigmas. Among these, the "bad mother stigma" was explicitly mentioned in one response:

"It would be more important to get rid of the "bad mother"-stigma from our society that condemns any mother who works and leaves their children full time in childcare. But this is a societal problem, which will probably change very slowly." (R2)

"Making sure that day-care/Hort and similar institutions are available for all children, without stigma for the children and mothers who use them [would be important]." (R 16)

"It is high time that the state invests in a public campaign to raise awareness that working mothers are not bad mothers. Children who attend kindergarten are not 'abandoned'—they are learning to socialize, to grow within a group, and to become more independent." (R 19)

The same stigma was not seen to apply for father-academics. Thus, one respondent raised the concern that "[we need] more incentive for men to take substantial parental leaves" (R3), another stated:

This can only work if care work is not seen as female labour, but as something every adult can perform. And labour one has to share. Masculinity norms in Austria need to be discussed and unlearned. Patriarchy is too strong in Austria, in particular in STEM fields. There should be no excuse for not providing assistance, help, consulting, mediation for people that vulnerable people (kids, other relatives) depend on. The experiences these people gain and the perspective these people can bring into their work place is highly valuable and I would even say fundamental for ethical aspects in future research. (R 13)

Other responses spoke to mother-academics being stigmatized as burdensome employees or bad academics, while their care-work was not valued at all, that care-work was rather interpreted as a sense-less or private burden.

"What could improve the current situation? To not punish people for having care responsibilities, but understand that reproductive labour is essential to society. No victim blaming of people who work less hours, but instead more support, assistance, day care options, summer camps for school kids, a university administration's commitment to a good and a well-funded university kindergarten, with

healthy food and a place to run (garden or nearby park). To take seriously the immense pressure put on people who have to take care of other humans who depend on them.” (R 13)

Punishment is mostly targeted towards mothers and much less so towards father-academics as former studies showed. As noted by Mason and colleagues (2013: “Some scientists may believe that mothers cannot be serious professionals because academic science demands exclusive attention to research. Yet men are not victims of bias against parents and parenthood, even though male scientists are far more likely to have children than are women scientists; two years after earning their Ph.Ds., nearly 50 percent of men have children under age six, compared with just over 30 percent of women.” (ibid.: 17-18)⁵

Last but not least, two respondents explicitly remind us that being a mother is not an illness and having children is not just a burden calling for a fundamental change in the ways we frame motherhood and parenthood in our society. Maybe, this also the perfect theme with which to end this overview of results.

“One should not just conceptualise children as a burden. Having children has made me a more efficient researcher and has boosted my ability to share my work to a younger and non-academic audience. It is unfortunate that children are excluded from our work. When I do not have care option, I do take my 7-year-old daughter to meetings, and it is incredible to see what she learns from it, how she comments on it, but also how people change in presence of children. I think having a family policy that is not just about compensation but that is about inclusivity would ease networks, would make researchers’ work more meaningful and would help them think of many creative ways they can share their research and gain from this interaction.” (R3)

“The upsides of being an academic with care duties? Love, love, love and a part of my life that has nothing to do with competition, but only connection. It can work to be a full time academic and have kids if day-care/kindergarten is inside the university building, works in a really professional way, the pedagogue gets paid well, gets appreciated by the institution and has assistants to support kids with special needs or neuro atypical cognitive challenges.” (R 13)

⁵ Father-academics lose out, too, as Mason et al. (2013) note. For them, the loss is not one of academic career development, but relates to their presence within their families: “Although family formation plays a more dramatic role in women’s academic careers, it does affect the choices that men make and how they manage to balance career and family. In particular, the status of fathers as equal caretakers is seriously challenged by many of the same professional obstacles that hold back mothers.” (ibid.: 1)

Some concluding remarks

... concerning limitations of this study:

We have to keep in mind that a mini-project like this cannot provide robust evidence on the current situation of mother-academics in Austria at large. The range of institutions and disciplines covered is broad, but the small number per institution and discipline does not allow for deducing general conclusions. Moreover, we did not further validate information provided on individual institutions. We therefore decided to blind all mentions of specific institutions, e.g., when it comes to availability and quality of local child-care facilities. Instead, we highly recommend to compile such information on a more robust empirical basis. Also, the issue of care work was mostly reduced to parenting and family issues. We got practically no information on any care-duties female academics face beyond parenting.

All generalisations we base on the empirical material gathered here will have the status of tentative hypotheses, requiring further research or substantiation via previously published, more extensive studies. We have introduced a few such studies in the introduction, but we have not undertaken a thorough literature review. We did find, though, that data on motherhood in academia are scarce (e.g., as compared to data on gender in academia) which resonates with a more general impression that parenthood is still mostly seen as a private matter whereas gender-related diversity has developed in a rather more public and organisational issue in the past decades.

... concerning potentials of this study:

All these limitations need to be specified to make the most of the results gathered here. The sample will allow all who do not live and work under the conditions researched here to gather first impressions of what it might mean to master the senior post-doc phase while at the same time caring for children as a female academic in Austria. It will also allow fellow female post-docs to see which challenges they share with others, how others cope with such challenges and to maybe take a step back and reconsider their own situations, to be more realistic in their expectations and more concise in their demands.

Right after sharing a first draft of this report in the network, we got much positive feedback, further substantiating some hypotheses and adding further literature and data. We encourage every future reader of the final version to voice their experiences, insights and opinions in constructive ways via our network address (contact@eliserichter.net), subject matter “compatibility”.

... concerning the main results of this study:

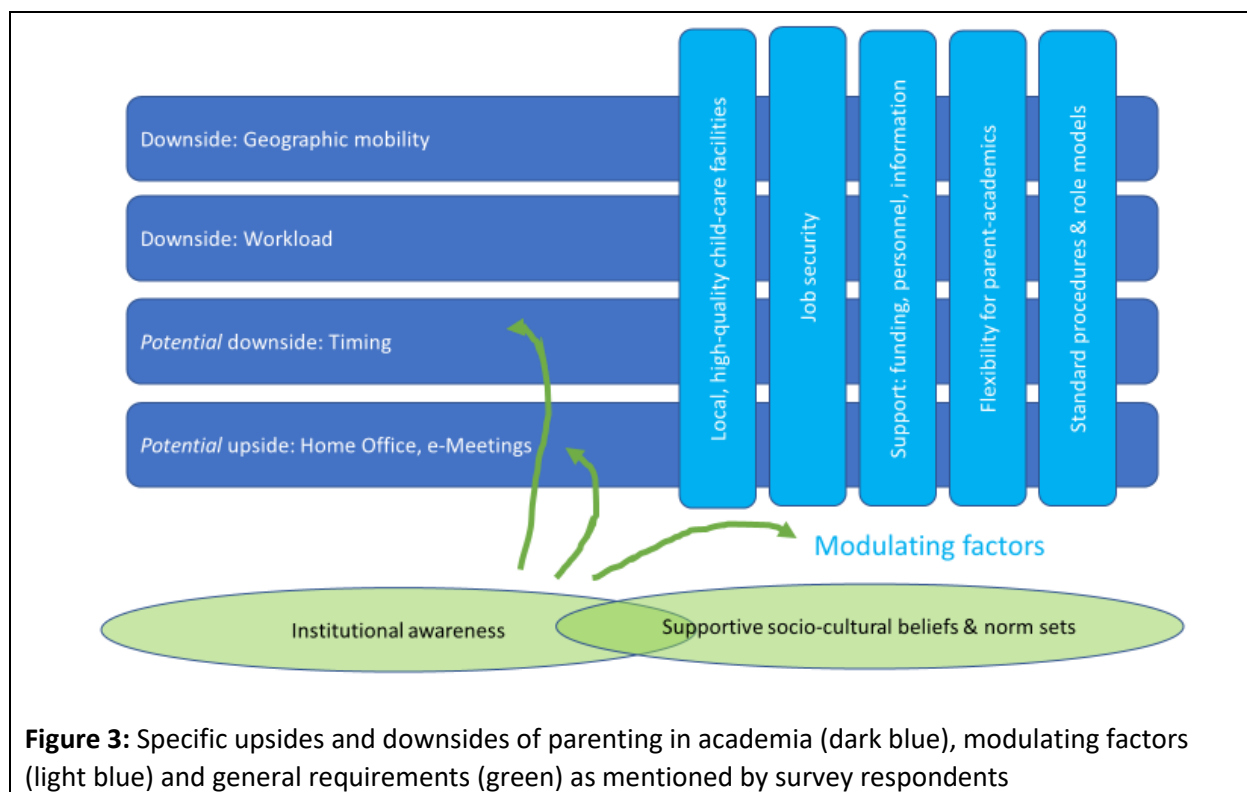
As to the responses we gathered and discussed here, the issues raised by our respondents do not run counter to what we already know from previous research about the compatibility of academic work, academic careers, private care-duties and family life. Main issues include mobility, workload, timing, extra costs, contracts and conventions that are based on a model academic without any care obligations.

We can discern between negative aspects that seem unavoidable (at least given the prevailing conception of academic work and life), like workload and geographic mobility, negative aspects that seem avoidable like scheduling meetings for late afternoons or evenings and positive aspects that are implemented to different degrees by different institutions and research groups like regular home office and e-meetings. Furthermore, respondents mentioned a long list of factors that can render academic careers and family duties far more compatible (or almost impossible, if absent), like local availability of high-quality child-care facilities, institutional flexibility, established ways and standard

procedures to address these issues in a constructive way, or role models that model constructive compromises and even showcase synergies. The likelihood of these factors occurring is related to organisational cultures (institutional awareness of the situation of parent-academics) and general societal expectations (or stigmas) regarding parenting and parenthood of mothers and fathers (for all this, see Figure 3, next page).

The more important it seems to further develop all modulating factors, so that what could *per se* be compatible really becomes compatible and even mutually enriching. At the moment, the amount of reported burdens is still immense. Moreover, they have to be faced mostly in isolation and individually. While active networking might be part of a solution, mother-academics also have the least spare time to engage in such activities. As a result, many factors other than academic excellence come to play a central role in academic careers. It is by far not guaranteed that the academically most able will get the best positions and that all academics can realise their potential to the full extent. Too many “ifs” still separate excellence from recognition and reward.

Last but not least, the current situation comes not only with extreme challenges for individual mother-academics and parent-academics more generally, it also backfires in research communities and research teams, promoting individualisation, fragmentation and alienation between parents and non-parents in academia and between academic personae with differing parenting modes and expectations.



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