Ten simple rules for making conferences more inclusive for women scientists with dependent children

Irene Mendoza

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### Ten simple rules for making conferences more inclusive for women (with children-caring responsabilities)

## Abstract

Scientific conferences are a critical aspect of academic research and career development. These events provide a platform for researchers to stay up-to-date on the latest advances in their field, exchange ideas, and connect with peers. However, for scientist-mothers, attending conferences can be challenging due to the “baby penalty.” This penalty refers to the difficulty nursing mothers face when traveling long distances or attending talks for long days, which can create serious economic and logistic restrictions with harmful consequences for their careers. To address this issue, it is crucial to make scientific conferences more inclusive for scientist-mothers. In this review, I will present several case studies of international conferences in the field of Ecology, critically analyzing their policies of child care and facilities for families. I have differentiated among measures affecting the childcare policy of the events, others reducing logistic barriers for nursing mothers and finally, economic measures that provide support for scientists attending with children. Although awareness on the topic has increased over the last years, unfortunately, not all organizers consider childcare before organizing conferences. Basic measures like providing breastfeeding or family rooms and allowing children in social activities can help attendees. Free entrance for accompanying person, or economic grants for nursing mothers or subsides to families are even less common. By making conferences more inclusive, we can reduce bias against female scientists and increase diversity and equity in science. This can also help reducing the leaking pipeline of women in the academic career, as conferences are essential for boosting collaborations.

## Outline

-Introduction: conundrum of attendance to scientific conferences -Methods: review of Ecological conferences in the last two years

#Introduction

Types of measures:

1- Change of mentality regarding children at conferences 2- Organization measures 3- Economic support

Examples of similar papers:

<https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1011284>

<https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1011994>

<https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1006914>

*#Rules* *#Rule 1: Make a conference children-friendly (ie, explicitly allow children attendance)* Children should be welcome to attend sessions as long as they are not disruptive, which is sometimes not easy, but at least gives the chance to each parent to choose the possibility of attending a talk with a sleepy baby, for instance. Some even issue conference badges for them.

*#Rule 2: Look for a safe and family-friendly conference venue* Improving safety of accommodation and transportation modes is not only useful for scientist taking with them their family, but also for all attendees in general, especially for women.

Having a parent lounge is a very appreciated idea, as attendees can stand there with their babies, but is something that a few conferences offer(<https://www.science.org/content/article/are-conferences-providing-enough-child-care-support-we-decided-find-out>). “Location, conference venue and hotel, is important for conference planning committees and maybe even more so for those with families. Pregnant women or families may not be a priority for conference planning committees, but they might consider their needs when selecting sites. Or at least realize that without accommodations, such as lounge space, and other family friendly planning, individuals are left to decide if they belong at academic and professional conferences when it can be challenging and even unwelcoming.”

*#Rule 3: give facilities for breastfeeding, changing nappies, heating food, family room…* One of the simplest measures, is to explicitly allow and encourage attending women to breastfeed their babies during conferences. Also, organizers should provide a comfortable and safe room for families, with a private space for breastfeeding or milk pumping.

*#Rule 4: Make schedule of attending mothers compatible with children*

Organizing more relaxed schedules at conferences is also very helpful for scientists attending with families or pregnant women (and for everyone in general, because conferences tend to be too busy). Try to be flexible for the parents presenting talks, given them the chance to choose the most suitable timing for their presentation, especially avoiding very late timing.

(a very interesting reflection on the topic here: <https://insidehighered.com/advice/2014/01/27/essay-attending-academic-conference-while-pregnant>)

*#Rule 5: Facilitate online or mixed formats* Advantages of in-person conferences vs. online conference are mostly due to networking and personal contact. For online attendants, this migth be lost, but a possibility is to create virtual meeting rooms for them to interact.

*#Rule 6: Facilitate onsite childcare with the hiring of a professional service with no (or reduced) cost for participant*

*#Rule 7: Create discounted parent/carer registrations*

*#Rule 8: Bourse student attendants carrying on children*

*#Rule 9: Encourage participation of women in general and this will also help attendants with children-caring responsabilities, as the most part of them will be mothers*

It has been shown in several studies that women tend to ask less in conferences, even if the speaker is another female. This can be contra-rested with some encouragement from chairpersons towards women, specially if they are students. Helping women to participate more in the questions will also increase the chances of participation of nursing mothers.

*#Rule 10: ??*