



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO FAMILIAL EXPECTATIONS

The Problem: There is evidence that “family formation” is one of the primary challenges to the retention of women in academia, with traditional family caregiving roles placing specific pressures on women. The traditional academic trajectory places individuals in graduate and postdoctoral positions across primary childbearing years, posing challenges due to the inherent insecurity of these academic positions coupled with frequent relocation and relatively low pay. Finding affordable day-to-day childcare is challenging enough for academic parents, and necessary travel – for conferences, talks, collaboration meetings, and “field” work – across those same key career stages adds additional complication. Aside from logistical considerations, women still face stigma in hiring while pursuing both a family life and a career in science, making disclosure of family status to ascertain potential benefits a potential risk.

Recommendations:

- All job candidates and department members – regardless of gender, age, or career stage – should be provided with a copy of the institutional and departmental leave policies and benefits. Those on hiring committees should receive specific training about which casual questions are permissible and which questions, intentionally or unintentionally, unlawfully ascertain family status.
- Conferences should provide flexible childcare funding, and if possible, departments should reserve some slots in on-campus daycare for the children of their members, including graduate students and postdocs for whom childcare costs can be exorbitant. Departments should also allow for flexible scheduling and remote work that can help alleviate some caregiving concerns.
- All meetings should be held during school/daycare hours where possible. Virtual meetings with materials that can be accessed asynchronously may be a way to accommodate both local schedules and international collaborators.
- Universities should offer all graduate students and postdocs the opportunity to be hired as employees, so that they can take advantage of parental protections and university leave policies. Students and postdocs should also have the option to extend their positions for a full year following parental leave to ensure that they do not get “off cycle” with the academic job market.

Picture an Astronomer: Best Practices for Retaining Talent in Astrophysics

<https://arxiv.org/abs/2512.24465>

<https://pictureanastronomer.github.io/whitepaper>