



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO FAMILIAL EXPECTATIONS

The Problem: There is strong evidence that “family formation” is one of the primary challenges to retaining women in academia, with traditional caregiving expectations placing disproportionate pressure on women. The conventional academic trajectory situates individuals in graduate school and postdoctoral positions throughout their primary child-bearing years, compounding challenges created by job insecurity, frequent relocation, and relatively low pay. Even securing day-to-day childcare can be difficult and costly for academic parents; required travel—for conferences, seminars, collaboration meetings, and field work—adds additional logistical and financial strain at precisely the same key career stages. Beyond these practical barriers, women continue to face stigma in hiring when pursuing both a family life and a career in science, making disclosure of family status, even simply to inquire about benefits, feel risky.

Recommendations:

- **Normalize transparency around benefits.** All job candidates and department members—regardless of gender, age, or career stage—should be provided with institutional and departmental leave policies and benefits. Members of hiring committees should receive explicit training on which casual questions are permissible and which unlawfully or inappropriately seek information about family status.
- **Reduce structural childcare burdens.** Conferences should provide flexible childcare funding. Where possible, departments should reserve guaranteed spaces in on-campus childcare centers for members’ families, including graduate students and postdocs, for whom childcare costs represent a large share of income. Flexible scheduling and remote participation policies can further reduce caregiving strain.
- **Respect family-compatible scheduling.** Whenever possible, meetings should occur during school/daycare hours. When scheduling constraints are unavoidable, particularly for international collaborations, virtual participation and asynchronous access to materials can help maintain inclusion.
- **Extend employment protections to early-career scholars.** Universities should ensure that graduate students and postdocs have the option to be hired as employees so they can access parental leave and related protections. Students and postdocs taking parental leave should also have the option to extend their appointments by a full year so they are not disadvantaged by being “off cycle” in 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>