



Academic Research- A Comparison Between Women and Men

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the comparison between men and women in academic research. This paper produces multiple career advancement and career family balance strategies, including professional support, personal support, value system, and life course strategies such as "ordering" of career and family, negotiating spousal support, and whether to have children. Research limitations/implications - Adaptive strategies facilitate engagement in career and family, even in challenging gender environments, encouraging continued research on executive. This paper looks at the issues impacting on women's career progression in academic research in scientific disciplines, which highlight the continued importance of positive action to ensure women scientists can achieve their full potential.

KEYWORDS

career progression, barriers, family obligations, mobility.

Introduction

In terms of increased confidence, collaboration and credibility, programme award winners testify to the valuable assistance of the Fellowships to their career advancement. This paper looks at the issues impacting on women's career progression in academic research in scientific disciplines, which highlight the continued importance of positive action to ensure women scientists can achieve their full potential report looks at the evidence of the barriers faced by female researchers at the early stages of their academic careers. It provides data on representation of female and male academic researchers, and a literature review of the barriers faced by women researchers in the academia. The report does not provide information about different initiatives set up to improve position of female researchers, nor recommendations, or a detailed contextual analysis. These are beyond the scope of this report and may be found in a number of government reports, EU sponsored work, as well as work, organization, and feminist science studies literature.

As the report discusses negative aspects of research careers, it should be noted here that academic research is generally viewed as enjoyable and intellectually rewarding by both female and male researchers (for example, Garforth and Kerr, 2009; Lober Newsome, 2008 and).

Evidence of barriers to successful research careers

Barriers to research careers perceived

The experiences and opinions of PhD students are included in this report, because doctorate students are the main source of potential researchers. Three main reasons provided included, firstly, modest pay, Secondly, the short-term nature of contacts and few possibilities for advancement to a more permanent post, thirdly, a possible need for relocation at the end of each contact. These findings give a certain degree of insight into the factors that deter young women from careers in research.

Barriers to research and academic careers faced by post-doctoral researchers

This process is progressive, continuous, and with a single upward trajectory (Garforth and Kerr, 2009). The research posts mostly come with fixed short-term contacts, low organizational status compared to permanent academic positions, and low pay relative to other forms of employment adequate to researchers' level of education and expertise. It should be noted here that many of the factors discussed below are pertinent to both women and men, but the multiplicity of factors affecting work life balance and the interplay between them is often decisive only in the case of women.

Short-term fixed contracts and employment insecurity

The insecurity of being on a fixed-term contract presents a major barrier to full enjoyment of the jobs in academic research (Oliver and Ackers, 2005). Although women are under-represented across a whole academic hierarchy including post-doctoral level, they congregate at the junior researcher positions, and are less likely to be promoted than their male counterparts. This means that they are more likely than men to remain in the post-doc cycle over many years.

Low organizational status

Contract researchers often suffer from lower organizational status compared to permanent academic staff. During the participant observation phase of their research some contract researchers commented on their official designation as 'academic-related' rather than 'academic' staff within higher education organisations. This undermines contract researcher's work-related identity and status.

Modest Pay Levels

Low pay relative to other forms of employment adequate to researcher's level of education and expertise contributes to financial insecurity and feelings of being under-valued. For instance, modest pay was one of the factors behind chemistry PhD student's reluctance to consider academic research as a career option (Lober Newsome, 2008).

Long-hours cultures of research particularly in sciences

Garforth and Kerr (2009) in a study report that women post-docs were particularly reflexive about the gendered trade-offs around work and life that academic roles involved. They were much more likely to be critical of the long-hours culture and the vocational demands of academic life.

Family obligations

Family considerations constitute a major deterrent to careers in research, as at that stage the critical ages for academic career development and family building coincide, forcing researchers to make choices and/or compromises. Evidence further shows that these choices, challenges and/or compromises are faced mainly by female researchers (Universities UK, 2008; Martinez, et al. 2007; University of Leeds Report, 2002; Whitelegg, et al. 2002). Most women need to make choices between research/academic careers and a family, and some women choose not to have children in order to avoid damaging their careers. Many women in the study perceived post-docking as incompatible with having a family (Lober Newsome, 2008). And indeed fewer women than men academics have children (Leeds University Report, 2002; Hawkins, 2002;

Whitelegg, et al. 2002; Athena, 2008). Not surprisingly women are more likely than men to foresee family responsibilities as a possible source of conflict with their future professional life. Similarly, spending time with family members other than children was considered to be extremely or very important. Findings of the study showed that women researchers with small children felt their career progression was slowed because they were exhausted, and thus unable to compete with men. The problems of combining family and academic work are already clear among PhD students. A perceived incompatibility between an academic career and motherhood and/or maintaining a work-life balance were cited by many as reasons behind that decision. In the study by Whitelegg et al. (2002), when asked to forecast how their careers might develop in future, most of the young women physicists interviewed raised issues concerned with the difficulties of combining working with raising a family.

Moreover, women often seem to be forced to take less ambitious route. And indeed evidence suggests that having children may have a negative effect on women's probabilities of tenured jobs and full professorships. Ginther and Kahn (2006) report that single women in academia do better at each stage than single men, Women who have a family, or intend to start a family, often decide to look for career options outside academia.

Insufficient provisions for part-time work and job/contract sharing

Two of the ways to ease the burden of combining work with family obligations, are part-time working and job/contract sharing arrangements. The findings of a study show that many women participants wanted the option of part time academic posts at least as a short-term solution when domestic duties were incompatible with full time employment. Men in this study were also interested in part-time working, and almost half of the male respondents who expressed an opinion also wanted the option to work part-time at some stage of their career (Leeds University Report, 2002). There was also a perception that part-time working was likely to carry less responsibility and so there would be fewer career development opportunities. Those who did put family before career reported that they did so with the understanding that they may not be able to pursue a research career at all and may have to change profession.

Insufficient support for women on maternity leave and sick leave

It has been reported by Oliver and Ackers (2005) that the agreement has encouraged funding bodies and research councils to make provisions to cover for maternity leave and sick pay to members of contract research staff (who fulfil the relevant qualifying conditions of the employing institution). In practice, however, a provision vary significantly at institutional level and between resources centres both in terms of the financial support for these situations and the possibility of extending the duration of grants (Oliver and Ackers, 2005). Female researchers are often reluctant to consider starting a family because maternity leave would mean a significant disruption to their research careers. There is also a lack of support for women returning from maternity leave. Research at the Faculty showed that although maternity leave was acknowledged by senior managers to be detrimental to women's career progression, no evidence of positive action to ameliorate this was found (Leeds University Report, 2002).

Barriers to mobility

Increased mobility has a major role in establishing networks of researchers across the EU, it allows for new ways of thinking to develop, and supports the academy in its pursuit of greater knowledge and new discoveries (Universities UK, 2008). It also raises significant barriers to the careers of female researchers, particularly amongst those who are partnered with other mobile researchers, which have not yet been addressed by policy-makers within the EU (Universities UK, 2008). Women with a partner and children face significant obstacles to their

mobility in pursuing a career in scientific research (Ackers, 2004; Martinez et al., 2007; Universities UK, 2008). Ackers established that when a couple were faced with an international move, women were more likely to defer to their partners career interests, whereas men in a similar situation were less likely to do this. These cultural pressures result in a major attrition of women who put their time and effort to studying for a doctorate and developing a scientific research career, thus creating a huge loss to the science profession.

Lack of female role models

Whitelegg et al. (2002) reported that several female researchers in their study said that it was difficult to tell whether there was a glass ceiling or not because they couldn't see any women in top positions in their professions. This implied to them that it is very hard to be feminine and progress in academia (Lober Newsome, 2008).

Gender pay gap

As already discussed the modest remuneration of post-doctoral researchers is one of the causes of attrition from academic research. Anderson and Connolly (2007) report that men are not only better paid because they are employed in more senior positions; they are also more likely to earn more within each grade than their female counterparts. Despite their qualifications and commitment to career, female scientists experience an unexplained pay gap (data collected by the ASSET survey, 2004, discussed in Anderson and Connolly, 2007).

Relentless competition among researchers for permanent posts

The findings of the Academic Research survey indicate that the job insecurity was manifest in two ways: firstly, the lack of short-term security when future funding remained uncertain; and secondly, the lack of long-term security, in terms of being able to build progression into a career and plan for long-term commitments (the ARCS survey, Warwick Institute for Employment Research, 1999, discussed in Oliver and Ackers, 2005).

Women predominate at junior researcher posts

This situation has not improved significantly for some time, which challenges the notion that a critical mass of women in the lower ranks of a profession should necessarily lead to greater gender equality in the more senior academic posts.

Overview of barriers faced by women returning to careers in research

Evidence shows that irrespective of women's academic qualifications, societal and cultural pressures often restrict their ability to work in a way that will further their careers (Ackers, 2003, 2004, Universities UK, 2008). Once women have children and take a career break, they usually become dependent upon their male partner's employment, and lose their place in research (Garforth and Kerr, 2009). Their return to research/academic careers is extremely difficult for women as they no longer have the linear unbroken career path that is the backbone of promotion system in the academia (for example Garforth and Kerr, 2009). In such a system career breaks, returning to research careers and sideways moves are very difficult. Further data and analysis of the support available to researchers moving back to research after working in other sectors or returning from career breaks would be valuable.

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