

Reconciliation of Academic Career and Family

Equal! Short Survey among Professors of ETH Zurich

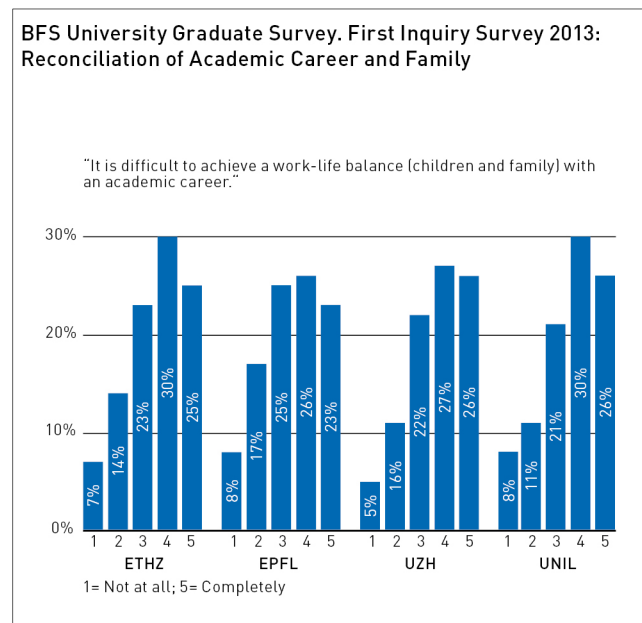
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1. Motivation

Every other year, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (BFS) and the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) conduct a survey among graduates of Swiss universities.¹ Among others, doctoral graduates of all Swiss universities are asked to assess reconciliation of an academic career in their area of expertise with children and family.²

Figure 1: BFS university graduate survey 2013. Reconciliation of academic career and family



Source: Own figure. Data of the BFS university graduate survey. First inquiry among doctoral graduates of 2013.

Out of the 446 doctoral graduates of ETH Zurich, 55% awarded a 4 or 5, i.e. they perceive reconciliation of an academic career with family obligations as rather difficult (compare fig. 1). Women have a more critical view on reconciliation than men.³ 63% of women indicated a value greater or equal to 4 in comparison to 51% of men. In addition, it is noticeable that reconciliation was rated more difficult the more children doctoral graduates have. In this case, there was no difference between men and women.

Equal is interested in determining whether these problems doctoral graduates see in reconciling academic career and family are possibly a result of the especially challenging situation during the phase of doctoral research. Are less problems visible after certain qualification obstacles have been passed, when professional perspectives are more secure and financial possibilities to acquire external support greater?

¹ The Swiss Federal Statistical Office and the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) regularly question Swiss university graduates on their situation of employment and education and follow their career path during the first 5 years after graduation. The following evaluation is based on the first inquiry among doctoral graduates of 2013.

http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/infothek/erhebungen_quellen/blank/blank/bha/00.html

² Exact phrasing: «Overall, how do you rate academic careers at institutions of higher education (incl. university-type research institutes) in your subject area?» Item: «It is difficult to achieve a work-life balance (children and family) with an academic career.» Value 1 «not at all» and value 5 «completely».

³ Male and female doctoral students of ETH Zurich both indicated a median of 4. A rank-based test using the Mann-Whitney test (U-test) shows a significant difference between the two genders. According to the test, women attained a higher rank in the U-test and thus demonstrated a more critical view of reconciliation of family obligations with an academic career.

In order to obtain first answers to these questions and because we are especially interested in the situation at ETH Zurich, we conducted a short survey among professors of ETH Zurich. In this survey, we asked the same question on reconciliation as can be found in the survey among doctoral graduates (compare appendix) in order to make results comparable. In addition we specifically asked for the assessment of reconciliation on the level of professorship.

Results that show whether reconciliation of academic career and family is especially problematic during the phase of doctoral research or in general a problem during the entire academic career up to professorship are important to identify measures that could help improve reconciliation. For ETH Zurich, measures that maintain and improve the positive combination of scientific excellence with family friendliness are especially interesting.

2. Questionnaire and Participation

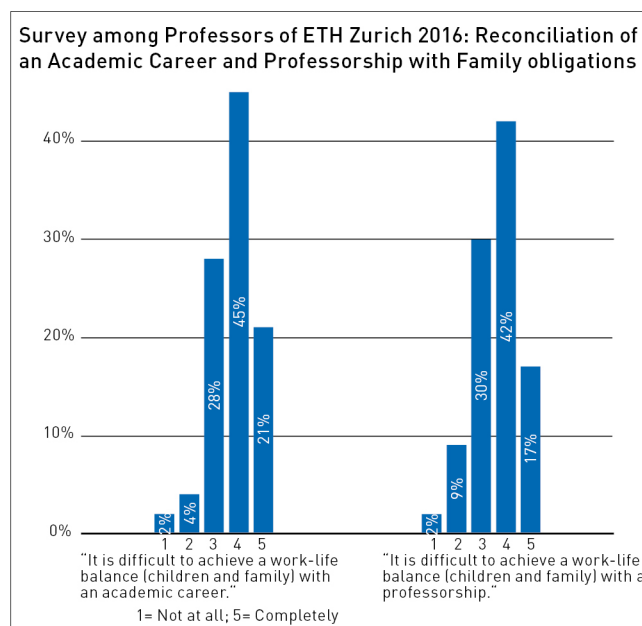
In May 2016, Equal! conducted a survey among professors of ETH Zurich using a short online questionnaire (see appendix). Professors were asked to assess reconciliation of an academic career in their area and in their professorship with family obligations. As mentioned before, questions and answer scales were chosen analogously to the survey among doctoral graduates according to BFS and SERI. Due to a focus on identifying measures for promoting reconciliation of academic career and family, the survey also asked for specific activities of professors to support reconciliation within their research group. Furthermore, survey participants were asked for their opinion on which measures ETH Zurich should initiate to (better) support their activities regarding reconciliation.

26.1% of the 368 contacted professors participated in the short survey; these were 10 female professors and 86 male professors. 82 out of the 96 persons indicated having 1 to 5 children.

3. Evaluation of Reconciliation

Overall, professors of ETH Zurich perceived reconciliation of an academic career with family obligations as rather difficult.

Figure 2: Evaluations of reconciliation of an academic career and professorship with family obligations



Source: Own figure. Equal! data.

66% of professors indicated a value of 4 or greater for reconciliation of academic career and family obligations.⁴ Also regarding work on the level of professorship, 60% of professors of ETH Zurich assessed reconciliation of academic career and family or children as rather difficult (values of 4 or 5)⁵, despite relatively great independence on the professorship level. Female professors view the situation as slightly more critical than their male colleagues. The more children female professors have, the more critical their evaluation of reconciliation of academic career or a professorship with family obligations is. For male professors, an opposite trend is visible. The more children they have, the easier they perceive reconciliation of an academic career with family obligations. It is to be noted, that statements on female professors are based on a small sample size (n=10).

A comparison with the periodical survey conducted by BFS and SERI among university graduates shows that ETH doctoral graduates view the situation less sceptically than ETH professors. Only 55% indicated a value of 4 or 5 for this question (compare Gender Monitoring 2015/2016⁶) in comparison to 66% of ETH professors.

Other studies, such as a study of the Swiss Academy of Arts and Sciences⁷ or a study of the Junge Akademie Deutschland⁸, also show that researchers perceive an academic career as difficult to reconcile with family obligations. Both studies refer to the lack of positive role and family models that master reconciliation matters satisfactorily.

4. Activities to Support Reconciliation of Academic Career and Family

In two open questions, Equal! asked professors of ETH Zurich which activities for better reconciliation of academic career and family obligations they undertake within their own research groups and how ETH can optimize their support concerning these activities.

Professors of ETH Zurich perceive an academic career as difficult to reconcile with family obligations, but support members of their research groups in handling their family obligations. 74% of professors (71 persons) indicated that they explicitly and actively support reconciliation of research and family in their group. They enable part-time arrangements, flexible work places and times as well as prolonged maternity leaves. Furthermore, meetings are predominately held during core working times. Often times, the entire work organization is discussed and adapted to the needs of group members. Some professors explicitly indicated that a high quality of results is more important than constant presence. In many research groups, reconciliation matters are openly and transparently discussed with the entire team. Occasionally, researching parents are also financially supported by their professors, for example by partially financing accompanying persons for childcare during visits abroad or conferences.

Those measures of ETH Zurich as a whole that support reconciliation of academic career and family are positively evaluated by professors of ETH Zurich. In the following bullet points, professors see potential for improvement:

⁴ Median = 4.0; Mean = 3.8

⁵ Median = 4.0; Mean = 3.6

⁶ Gender Monitoring 2015/16: <https://www.ethz.ch/services/en/employment-and-work/working-environment/equal-opportunities/strategie-und-zahlen/gender-monitoring.html>

⁷ Swiss Academy of Arts and Sciences (2016): Assessment of the career situation of young female scientists in Switzerland. 11(2). <http://www.akademien-schweiz.ch/index/Publikationen/Swiss-Academies-Communications.html>

⁸ Lipphardt, V. et al. (Hrsg.) (2016): Wissenschaft und Familie. Wie familiengerecht ist Deutschlands Wissenschaftssystem? Die junge Akademie Deutschland.

http://blog.diejungeakademie.de/fileadmin/seiteninhalte/JA_Publikation_WissenschaftFamilie_Webansicht.pdf

- Childcare possibilities should become more flexible.
- Childcare offers during school holidays should be extended.
- Prices for childcare places and especially for childcare during school holidays should be lowered.
- Agreements on part-time and flexible work should be better supported. Doctoral students are to be employed at 100% (full-time) since 2015.⁹ Exceptions require a written explanation and are permitted in case of parenthood. The approval procedure should be simplified. Furthermore, the maximum duration of employment should be extended in case of part-time employment.^{10 11}
- Some professors advocated the establishment of a career path without the goal of a professorship.
- “Hardship Funds” were also welcomed that support bridging situations or other additional (emergency) costs for childcare.
- Finally, the establishment of an ETH-wide substitution system for administration and laboratory work was proposed.¹²

Regarding professorship, it was proposed that ETH Zurich relieves professors from some of their administrative obligations and functions in commissions. Meetings of the ETH executive board should be planned during core work times. In case of late meetings, childcare possibilities should be provided. It is furthermore proposed to use sabbaticals for family obligations. Professorships should be permitted to be lead part-time; explicitly named was an 80%-professorship.

5. Conclusion

The survey among professors of ETH Zurich shows that professors too – not just doctoral graduates – perceive an academic career (including professorship) as difficult to reconcile with family obligations. However or as a result, they support members of their teams in mastering the reconciliation problem. A comparison with data from BFS/SERI with data from the survey at ETH shows that professors are more sceptical than the young generation of doctoral students regarding reconciliation of academic career and family.

During the last years, ETH Zurich has already implemented different measures to support reconciliation that are all meant to promote and stabilize the positive combination of excellence and family friendliness. In 2016 some further measures were introduced:

⁹ According to the regulations of scientific staff at ETH Zurich Art. 7, all doctoral students have to be employed full-time. Part-time employments require special grounds for exceptions to this rule, like parenthood.

https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/associates/services/Anstellung-Arbeiten/Downloads/files/rechtliches/Verordnung_wissenschaftliches_Personal.pdf

¹⁰ Art.7 «Verordnung über das wissenschaftliche Personal der Eidgenössischen Technischen Hochschule Zürich» (compare footnote 9)

¹¹ Likewise in Germany applies the rule of maximum duration of employment for scientific staff. (Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz – WissZeitVG - Art. 1 G). Due to family obligations, the maximum duration can be extended. However, this does not apply for employments financed by third-party funds.

¹² The University of Cambridge provides a similar system for the administrative sector. <http://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/hr-services/tes> .

- To support individual and flexible arrangements between (expecting) mothers and fathers and their supervisors, a conversation guide “maternity” and the leaflet “parenthood”¹³ is offered since summer 2016. The guideline helps to find individual and reliable arrangements between (expecting) parents and their supervisors.¹⁴
- To further accommodate parents’ needs at ETH Zurich, the foundation kihz will offer the pilot project “kihz flex” at the new nursery on the campus Hönggerberg financed by ETH Zurich starting in September 2016. Flexible and need-orientated short-term childcare is enabled in the scope of this project.¹⁵
- A further renewal will be introduced by ETH Zurich in November 2016. Doctoral and post-doctoral researchers with infants of up to 18 months can apply for a Robert-Gnehm Grant¹⁶, if they present their research results at an important conference leading to additional costs for childcare. Robert-Gnehm Grants amount up to 3000 Swiss Francs for individual researchers. Applications can be submitted three times per year.
- Regarding (financial) gaps between employments, for example between doctoral and post-doctoral research, the human resources department of ETH Zurich offers support and counselling.
- A scientific career path without the goal of a professorship is being discussed in the departments BAUG and MAVT who would like to reinforce the position of senior scientists (compare report on the implementation of the Gender Action Plan. Status 2016¹⁷).
- (Temporary) Part-time professorship with high percentages of employment as already existing in the departments ARCH and BIOL.

Overall, ETH Zurich is on a good path towards improving reconciliation of academic career and family obligations. This can be concluded from the ETH employee survey 2016.¹⁸ Employees view the fact that ETH as an employer allows the combination of attractive work content with family friendly work conditions as a strength.¹⁹ Considering the high flexibility and autonomy of ETH Zurich, it can be assumed that quick and adequate actions can be carried out.

¹³ Conversation guide «maternity» and the leaflet «parenthood»: <https://www.ethz.ch/services/en/employment-and-work/working-environment/family/maternity.html>

¹⁴ The pilot study «Reconciliation of (post-)doctoral research and family.» conducted at ETH shows, that clear agreements between (post)docs and supervisors regarding further career steps are a key point. Pilot study «Reconciliation of (post-)doctoral research and family.»: https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/associates/services/Anstellung-Arbeiten/chancengleichheit/Strategie_und_Zahlen/Monitoring%20und%20Studien/Studien/Rec_eng.pdf

¹⁵ kihz Flex: http://www.kihz.ethz.ch/kihz_flex/index

¹⁶ Regulations Robert Gnehm Grants: <https://www.ethz.ch/services/en/employment-and-work/working-environment/equal-opportunities/beratung-und-information/vereinbarkeit-von-familie-und-beruf/elternschaft-an-der-eth.html>

¹⁷ Gender Action Plan. Implementation in the departments and administrative units 2016. <https://www.ethz.ch/services/en/employment-and-work/working-environment/equal-opportunities/strategie-und-zahlen/gender-action-plan.html>

¹⁸ ETH Zurich employee survey 2016: <https://www.ethz.ch/services/en/employment-and-work/leadership-and-development/employee-survey.html>

¹⁹ See also: Caren Battaglia (2016): Chef, biete was für die Familie. In: Wir Eltern! <http://www.wireltern.ch/artikel/0316-chef-biete-was-fuer-die-familie>

6. Appendix: Survey among professors of ETH Zurich

Introduction:

“This year’s Gender Monitoring will have a special focus on the balancing of family and career issues. We are especially interested in how young researchers could manage the advancement of their careers if they have family obligations. What is the view of ETH professors on this topic? May we kindly ask you to take a few minutes to answer our questions? Thank you! Your answers will be treated anonymously.

Thank you for your support!

Your Equal!-Team“

It is difficult to achieve a work-life balance (children and family) with an academic career.*

- 1 Not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Completely

It is difficult to achieve a work-life balance (children and family) as a professor.

- 1 Not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Completely

Are you taking specific actions to alleviate the situation of researchers with family obligations in your group?

- Yes. Please specify: _____
- No.

How could ETH Zurich support you with respect to the balancing of work/career issues and family obligations in your group?

(open question) _____

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

What is your age?

- < 30
- 31 – 40
- 41 – 50
- > 50

Do you have children?

- Yes. How many children do you have?: _____
- No.

Raw data of this survey is available at Equal. They can be provided in anonymized form upon request.

7. References

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[Arbeiten/chancengleichheit/Strategie und Zahlen/Gender%20Action%20Plan/ENG/Gender Action Plan e 08 14.pdf](#) on the 01.09.2016

ETH Zurich executive board (2014): Verordnung über das wissenschaftliche Personal der Eidgenössischen Technischen Hochschule Zürich.

https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/associates/services/Anstellung-Arbeiten/Downloads/files/rechtliches/Verordnung_wissenschaftliches_Personal.pdf

on the 01.09.2016

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University of Cambridge: Temporary Employment Service (TES). <http://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/hr-services/tes> on the 01.09.2016

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