

Az MTA TK Szociológiai Intézete tisztelettel meghívja
ötvenhetedik Jour fixe eseményére:

Paksi Veronika:
Work-life balance of female PhD students engineering

Akadémiai szimpózium

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Abstract

In spite of the tremendous efforts, women are still under-represented in the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Their proportion compared to men is already lower in tertiary education and it further decreases in Research and Development (R&D), where we hardly find any women in top positions (She Figures, 2015). Reasons are multifaceted and can differ according to life course stages. The 'academic pipeline' is significantly leaking during early research career and loses women to a greater extent than men.

Professional women tend to leave science mainly after obtaining their PhD (Xie and Shauman 2003). The early-stage research career is a special life period when young women often study, work and raise children at the same time, therefore, they possibly face the majority of the obstacles to women's career advancement. Though work-life balance and especially the timing of motherhood play a vital role in a successful research career, qualitative data on this life period is scarce. Our two papers focus on

- 1) How the normative and institutional contexts shape the timing of childbearing of female PhD students in engineering.
- 2) How female PhD students in engineering balance their study, work and family life.

Our research was based on a dual theoretical framework of the life course and work-life balance theories. Based on 11 individual interviews with female PhD students in engineering we explored a) how contradicting social norms of childbearing cause tensions in post-graduate students' lives, b) how the different uncertainties and risks permeate their decisions on early life events, c) how they struggle and often fail to find the required work-life balance, d) how the field of science – in our case, the laboratory work – affects their professional and family life. We concluded that despite the general pattern of delaying motherhood among higher educated women, these students struggle against this postponement, and they hardly have any good options to avoid risk stemming from uncertainties and from some characteristics of studying and working in engineering. Findings of this research may call the attention of stakeholders to the possible intervention points.

Keywords:

PhD, timing of motherhood childbearing, work-life balance, women, uncertainty, life course, engineering

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