



## OPINIONS

## Family-friendly policies must target men too

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**Policies that help remove the stigma around childcare will help put men and women on an equal footing in science, says *Mary Ann Mason*.**

It is well known that having babies can derail women scientists' careers. Across the world, in developed and developing countries alike, women still take on a large share of domestic duties even as they work to advance their careers.

The problem persists even in countries that have made great strides towards equality in the workplace. In a study of US academics we found that women scientists with children are 39 per cent less likely than men with children to attain tenure.

We must encourage fathers to become equal participants in raising children. And to do that, we need institutions willing to implement policies that nurture a new culture where neither women nor men see family as a threat to their career.

### The 'second shift'

There is a 'second shift' waiting at home for working women with children. Our survey of more than 8,000 University of California (UC) faculty revealed that mothers worked a 95-hour week, with 43 hours of that devoted to child care and housework. Fathers worked 81 hours a week, with only 26 devoted to domestic duties.

Some might dismiss that as a waning phenomenon of an older generation. But we found the same pattern in the 8,000 doctoral students we surveyed at UC Berkeley — except they worked longer hours.

This isn't restricted to the United States. I recently spoke at the University of Lund in Sweden — a country committed to gender equality — and was told that Swedish women also bear the brunt of childcare and domestic chores, and struggle to attain the highest professorial levels.

And it was only when the government mandated that it be used or lost that fathers in Sweden began to use the parental leave available to them.

### Barriers to change

But before we point fingers at fathers, let us acknowledge the social and institutional barriers that may prevent them from doing more to raise their families.

Father-as-breadwinner is a deeply held cultural stereotype across all societies that I have studied.



Men often fear the stigma of taking parental leave — but family-friendly policies can change traditional attitudes

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Many fathers in our UC faculty survey expressed a reluctance to use new family-friendly policies introduced by the University of California, such as stopping the tenure clock for childbirth and teaching relief for new fathers, because they believed they were put in place for women.

Even men who spent a substantial portion of their time as caregivers believed they would be stigmatised for taking the leave. One faculty father said, "In my opinion, there is a certain culture surrounding asking for teaching relief that makes it difficult for male faculty to consider this as a viable option."

Many mothers, on the other hand, did not use the benefits because they were concerned that they would be considered less-than-serious 'players'. "Prior to tenure I would never have considered using the option," one mother said. "I would have considered it ... a fatal flaw."

### **Breaking the cycle**

That is the vicious circle of culture change. Fathers are reluctant to use parental relief because it is contrary to the ethic of the male breadwinner. And mothers are afraid to use policies that only women use for fear they will be considered less serious than men.

At the University of California we have tried to break this cycle with initiatives that include a temporary, part-time tenure track with the right of return to full time, and the right to emergency childcare while on full-time tenure.

It is important to ensure that all faculty members are aware of the benefits to which they are entitled, so we began a campaign to emphasise these policies in recruitment and retention.

These policies need some investment. But studies have shown that losing a tenure track faculty — mother or father — is an overall economic loss. Each university, and each nation in all parts of the world, invests a great deal of their money and future ambitions into training young scientists. They cannot afford to lose them.

### **Baby boom**

Culture does not change easily but there are early signs of improvement at the University of California: more mothers and fathers are taking advantage of automatic entitlements — not benefits that must be requested.

And we are having a most encouraging baby boom. Between 2003 (before the new initiatives), and 2009 (after), the percentage of female assistant professors with at least one child more than doubled, from 27 per cent to 64 per cent. For men it rose from 39 per cent to 59 per cent.

Cultural change occurs when both fathers and mothers use family-friendly policies. Only then will strongly held stereotypes against men as committed caregivers dissipate, paving the way for a greater contribution to family life that helps put men and women on an equal footing in their career.

As new attitudes become the norm, women and men working in science will no longer look upon family-friendly policies as a parent trap that grinds careers to a halt.

*Mary Ann Mason is a professor and co-director of the University of California Berkeley Law Center on Health, Economic & Family Security and the co-author of the study of women scientists, Staying Competitive: Patching the Leaky Pipeline in the Sciences, and the book, Mothers on the Fast Track.*

This article is part of a Spotlight on Overcoming gender barriers in science.