

Motherhood 'detrimental' to women's scientific careers, study concludes

February 14 2012

Women with advanced degrees in math-intensive academic fields drop out of fast-track research careers primarily because they want children – not because their performance is devalued or they are shortchanged during interviewing and hiring, according to a new study at Cornell University.

"Motherhood – and the policies that make it incompatible with a tenure-track research career – take a toll on [women](#) that is detrimental to their professional lives. Even just the plan to have [children](#) in the future is associated with women exiting the research fast-track at a rate twice that of men," report Cornell human development professors Wendy Williams and Stephen Ceci in the March-April issue of the journal *American Scientist*.

"It is time for universities to move past thinking about underrepresentation of women in science solely as a consequence of biased hiring and evaluation, and instead think about it as resulting from outdated policies created at a time when men with stay-at-home wives ruled the academy," said Williams, who founded the Cornell Institute for Women in Science, a research and outreach center that studies and promotes the careers of women scientists.

For the study, Williams and Ceci analyzed data related to the academic careers of women and men with and without children in academic fields, including math-heavy ones. They found that before becoming mothers, women have careers equivalent to or better than men's. "They are paid

and promoted the same as men, and are more likely to be interviewed and hired in the first place," Williams said.

More information:

www.americanscientist.org/issue...-choose-motherhood/1

The study builds on previous research by Williams and Ceci published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* showing that women in math-intensive fields did not face discrimination in hiring, publishing or funding.

Provided by Cornell University

Citation: Motherhood 'detrimental' to women's scientific careers, study concludes (2012, February 14) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-02-motherhood-detrimental-women-scientific-careers.html>

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