

Family-friendly tenure policies result in salary penalty for professors

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Well-intentioned policies to make achieving tenure more family-friendly actually have negative consequences for the salaries of college faculty, says a study co-written by University of Illinois labor and employment relations professor Amit Kramer. Credit: School of Labor and Employment Relations

Well-intentioned policies to make achieving tenure more family-friendly actually have negative consequences for the salaries of college faculty members, a study co-written by a University of Illinois labor and employment relations professor shows.

Whether it's for the birth or adoption of a child, or a [family situation](#) that involves extended caregiving, both male and female [faculty members](#) who "stop the tenure clock" for family reasons earn a salary that's 3.1 to 4.3 percent lower the following year – even when there is no significant drop-off in the number or quality of their research output, according to new research co-written by Amit Kramer.

"The findings of the paper indicate that use of a tenure rollback policy incurs a salary penalty that cannot be explained away by a change in the quantity or quality of publications," Kramer said.

Kramer, who co-wrote the study with Colleen Flaherty Manchester and Lisa M. Leslie, both of the University of Minnesota, says although the paper's general findings are encouraging, any evidence that tenure rollback policies can be used to make inferences about a faculty member's commitment should be a cause for concern.

"Tenure clock rollback policies are achieving their main goal in that tenure-track faculty who decide to hit the pause button for family reasons have similar levels of research productivity as their colleagues," he said.

But the salary penalty is consistent with a commitment hypothesis – evaluators treat the use of rollback policies for family reasons as a "negative signal" about a faculty member's underlying commitment to [academic work](#), suggesting that salary decisions are affected by subjective factors, Kramer says.

"The norm in academia is that success requires the focused pursuit of academic work at the expense of other responsibilities, including family," he said. "That suggests that the use of these policies may be detrimental to the career outcomes of tenure-track faculty members. In particular, evaluators may perceive stopping the clock for family reasons

as an indicator that the faculty member lacks the commitment to his or her academic role. And that, in turn, may constrain their career prospects."

Tenure rollback policies allow tenure-track faculty members to delay their tenure review, typically in increments of one year, if they experience events that are likely to negatively affect their [research productivity](#).

The goal of rollback policies is to level the playing field for faculty members who experience productivity shocks, thereby allowing them to demonstrate their scholarly capabilities by the time of their tenure decision, according to the paper.

Furthermore, the researchers found evidence that tenure rollback policy use has a persistent effect on salary decisions for male faculty members, but not for female faculty members. The finding is consistent with the possibility that men are penalized for using rollback policies for family reasons to a greater extent than women are because use violates traditional gender roles, Kramer says.

"There is no overall gender effect – male and female faculty are similarly penalized a year following the use of the rollback," Kramer says. "The salary penalty lasts for approximately three years, but it differs by gender: While women seem to suffer a single penalty one year after stopping their clock, men are penalized twice, a year after they stop their clock and again, two years after they stop the clock."

For organizations, including major research institutions, the implications are clear, Kramer says.

"If you offer family and life-friendly policies to your employees, make sure usage of these policies does not result in negative outcomes for

employees," he said. "Otherwise, your star employees, those you would like to keep, will not take advantage of that benefit and might consider moving to a more supportive organization."

For tenure-track professors, Kramer suggests thinking carefully about the implications of using family- and life-related policies in organizations that formally have these policies but may informally discourage their use.

"For major research institutions, I would say that they need to encourage faculty members to roll back their clock when they really need it. But at the same time, they also need to educate senior faculty on the benefits of tenure clock rollback as well as the tendency to unjustly penalize the wages of faculty who have used the benefit."

Tenure clock rollback is just one example of family- and life-supportive policies that organizations offer their employees to help them deal with stressful and time-consuming non-work situations, Kramer says.

"Many organizations can and do offer other family- and life-supportive policies such as flexible work arrangements, telecommuting options, job share and compressed workweeks, to name just a few," he said. "But many employees are not even aware of the range of policies that are offered by organizations. And even if they are aware of the available policies, sometime they are reluctant to use them, even in times of need, because they are worried about the negative impression it would send to their employer, in addition to the impact it might have on their career prospects."

The study was published in the journal *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*.

More information: The article, "Is the Clock Still Ticking? An

Evaluation of the Consequences of Stopping the Tenure Clock," is available [online](#).

Provided by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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