

Female researchers publish childcare recommendations for conference organizers

March 12 2018, by Stacy Nagai



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Many women in science are raising concerns over the fact that parents with young children are often excluded from fully participating in

academic conference activities.

Early-stage researchers in the sciences often try to attend face-to-face academic conferences to advance their career by communicating new discoveries, forming collaborations, meeting potential funding agencies and recruiting new students. As the primary caregivers to [young children](#), these parent-researchers, particularly women, face hurdles to fully attend and participate in necessary conferences due to pregnancy, breastfeeding, and caretaking conundrum addressed by a Working Group of Mothers in Science.

With a young child herself, Chapman University assistant professor of biological sciences, Patricia C. Lopes, Ph.D., has experienced this predicament many times.

"It's a serious problem because it creates a culture of inequity for parents, with mothers generally experiencing greater disadvantages than fathers because of biological, prejudicial and often socially-driven childcare demands," Lopes said.

Research shows this "baby penalty" negatively affects the career mobility of women, but not of men. Women of color face even larger disadvantages. Lopes joined a group of women in [science](#) to tackle this problem, seeking to help research societies and [conference](#) organizers better accommodate mothers and families. They hope that once changes are made by those willing to take leadership roles, [women](#) will no longer be excluded from full participation and therefore creativity and productivity in the sciences as a whole will flourish.

Their recommendations include:

- Supporting mothers' attendance by offering financial support for individually arranged childcare at smaller conferences or onsite

childcare for larger conferences. This would allow for frequent check-ins from parents and support breastfeeding.

- Redistribute the ways in which scientific society use their funds are used, or modestly increase registration and/or exhibitor fees to support on-site childcare.
- Offer discounted registration to parents who can attend only a portion of the conference.
- Offer grants to fund travel and housing for caregivers.
- Include family-friendly policies, events, resources and day schedules in conference advertisement materials.
- Offer early-registrant parents flexibility in selecting the day and time they give their presentation.
- Allow [parents](#) to share their nursing requirements, such as a private nursing room with a sink, on conference registration forms in order to better anticipate needs.
- List resources in forms that extend beyond nursing, such as access to filtered water and bottle warmers, as well as baby changing facilities in all restrooms.

The group contends that adoption of any recommended practices will "send a strong and positive message that organizations recognize the issues parent-researchers face and they are working to support an inclusive, family-friendly environment."

This opinion piece, titled How to tackle the childcare-conference conundrum was published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*.

Provided by Chapman University

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