

Call for unis and others to consider women juggling research/childcare

March 29 2019



Offering financial aid to cover childcare costs for female academics attending conferences is one of the suggestions offered by QUT researchers who surveyed Australian women on how caring for children has affected their careers. They also recommend institutions and funding bodies that use publication and citation benchmarks as a key criteria for appointment, promotion and the awarding of grants should adjust those to cater for women who have cared for children. Credit: QUT Marketing & Communication

Offering financial aid to cover childcare costs for female academics attending conferences is one of the suggestions offered by QUT researchers who surveyed Australian women on how caring for children has affected their careers.

The decreased opportunity to network is a serious barrier to many [women](#) when it comes to getting their name out and meeting potential funding or research partners.

The paper by Professor Adrian Barnett and Lauren Sewell from QUT's School of Public Health and Social Work, just published by *PLOS One*—[The impact of caring for children on women's research output: A retrospective cohort study](#)—also recommends institutions that use publication and citation benchmarks as a key criteria for appointment and promotion should adjust those to cater for women who have cared for children.

"There is emerging evidence that women who care for children collaborate less with their colleagues, which could be a result of commitments outside of work like greater child-caring responsibilities," said Professor Barnett.

"These factors need to be considered when research output is assessed for the granting of funding—it is not enough to view research performance only in the context of reduced hours.

"Individual cases need to be looked at because caring for children can affect different women in different ways. A [single parent](#) with limited family support will most likely find it harder to attending important networking events and collaborate with peers compared to someone with access to childcare and a supportive partner."

Professor Barnett said that Australia's two primary funding

agencies—the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Australian Research Council (ARC) have both come under fire for giving too much weight to research quantity rather than quality, with some researchers accusing it of being an 'old boys' club'.

"Both ARC and the NHMRC allow applicants to detail career disruptions which may have impacted on their research performance, including child birth and carer responsibilities and assess outputs relative to that, but it is unclear how that is achieved," he said.

"There is also limited research which quantifies the impact of caring for children on research output and studies have had conflicting results.

"Our study aimed to address many of the limitations of previous research. We evaluated women's output over their entire career and measured both the output and visibility of women using publications and citations.

"We also used three measures of research collaboration to investigate a potential impact of women's networks after caring for children—the number of authors per paper, the number of affiliations per year and the number of co-author countries outside Australia."

The study included 95 women who were randomly selected from papers published in three Australian journals between 2007 and 2015—the *Medical Journal of Australia*, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, or the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*.

"We looked at annual publication and citation counts which are viewed as an essential measure of research quality, visibility and relevance," Professor Barnett said.

"In the end, our results revealed a complex picture, with differential impacts on output depending on the number of children, the outcome considered, and the presence of statistically influential women.

"Caring for children was negatively associated with citations, especially for women who cared for two children, who are far more common. The ability to travel to research conferences in Australia and overseas is also greatly affected.

"A simple numerical adjustment to a women's track record is unlikely to be possible, because the impact of caring for children is so varied that the average impact is meaningless.

"As well as looking after [children](#), some of our participants pointed out they were often the primary carers for elderly parents which could also end up having a big impact on their career."

More information: Lauren Sewell et al, The impact of caring for children on women's research output: A retrospective cohort study, *PLOS ONE* (2019). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0214047](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0214047)

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

Citation: Call for unis and others to consider women juggling research/childcare (2019, March 29) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-03-unis-women-researchchildcare.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.