

No pay gap for female zoo vets, but children perceived as career hindrance

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For female veterinarians who want to specialize in zoological work, a new study on family work and income for diplomates of the American College of Zoological Medicine (ACZM) holds both good and bad news.

While women in the field don't seem to suffer from a gender pay gap, many feel that they must give up on having children in order to succeed.

Becoming an ACZM diplomate is an arduous process. Candidates have two paths to the achievement: either internship and residency at a zoo for four to six years after finishing a doctorate of veterinary medicine, or full-time work in a zoo for six years. Both paths require the applicant to publish three to five research papers in the field and pass a two-day exam.

"There aren't a lot of ACZM diplomates in the world—fewer than 300—but there aren't that many zoos, either, so it is a very competitive field," says Tara Harrison, associate professor of zoological medicine at North Carolina State University and lead author of the study.

Harrison sent a 127-item [online survey](#) to 201 ACZM diplomates (106 females and 95 males) classified as active members in 2018. Responses were anonymous. The survey contained questions regarding career type, job title, annual income, benefits, gender, race and ethnicity, job location, whether respondents had [children](#), whether respondents had chosen to delay having children, whether having children had affected respondents' career, and whether respondents felt that gender had affected their career.

"We did this first of all because of the perception that diplomates are highly trained, but that their salaries don't compare with those of other specialties," Harrison says. "Samantha Morello, associate professor at the Cornell Center for Veterinary Business and Entrepreneurship, had done a similar study in veterinarians, so we partnered to repeat the study on this population."

The study found that compared to other veterinary specialists—who make an average of \$130,000 per year—ACZM diplomates did make

less, with a mean salary of \$105,000 per year (higher for those in academia and lower for those working in zoos and aquariums). There were no differences in incomes between male and female respondents when they were matched for gender and age. Additionally, there were no significant differences in [income](#) between males and females with or without children.

But when it came to having a family, respondents' perception of its effect on career did differ by gender. Seventy-six percent of females and 47% of males reported delaying having children because of their career. Additionally, 65% of females with children felt that having children had a negative effect on their career, compared to 16% of males with children. Finally, 85% of [females](#) without children, and 44% of [males](#) without children, thought having children would have negatively affected their careers.

"It is startling how many women thought kids would have an effect or felt that they did have an effect on career," Harrison says. "Perhaps this is due to the competitive nature of the field—the respondents believe availability and the ability to move to where the jobs are can be affected by having children.

"I hope that diplomates—particularly women, since this concept affects them disproportionately—aren't feeling pressure not to have families because they feel they can't have one and do the [career](#) properly," Harrison says.

The research appears in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.

More information: Tara M. Harrison et al, Effects of gender on income and family planning for diplomates of the American College of Zoological Medicine, *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical*

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