Some male scientists willing to forsake careers for family

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One third of men in academic science are willing to scale back their careers to focus on family life, according to researchers.

While traditional fatherhood roles may be shifting, men in the male-dominated field of academic science, such as physics and biology, face significant challenges in trying to balance work and family life, said Sarah Damaske, assistant professor of labor and employment relations and sociology, Penn State. The majority of men studied spoke of the pull of fatherhood and a desire to spend more time with children, yet they also acknowledged that academic science often demands an intense devotion to work coupled with very long work hours. A small portion of the sample explained that they expected to not have children, because they saw fatherhood as incompatible with the demands of academic science.

"These findings suggest to us that the academy does not merely have a gender problem, but also a child-rearing problem—men who want to have and spend time with their children likely will face challenges in academic science," said Damaske, who worked with Elaine Howard Ecklund, Autrey Professor of Sociology, Rice University; Anne Lincoln, associate professor of sociology, Southern Methodist University and Virginia White, graduate student, University of Chicago.

The researchers said that one-third of men in academic science largely expect to be involved equally at home and are willing to reduce their work devotion to do so. The study also showed that 64 percent of men

interviewed spoke of their desire to be more involved at home and indicated that they make efforts to spend increased time at home. However, 15 percent of respondents chose to forgo childrearing, either by marrying and making a commitment not to have children or by remaining single with no intention of having children.

Ecklund said the work-life balance of male scientists is not as well studied as other aspects of family life.

"Despite the growing amount of research devoted to women in science, there has been relatively little research on the work-life balance of men in academic science," Ecklund said. "The majority of existing research on academic men has focused on differences between men and women, leaving us with little information about variation among male scientists. Yet, academic science remains dominated by men, so we need to know if they deal with the same issues balancing work and family life as do women."

The study, which appears currently in the online version of *Work and Occupations* and is scheduled for the November print issue, included in-depth interviews with 74 men across different ranks in biology and physics at prestigious U.S. universities. The interviews were conducted between June 2009 and April 2011 and took between 20 minutes and two hours. Each respondent was interviewed once, either in person or by phone. The average age of men in the sample was 41; the median age was 39.

The researchers asked participants about whether they had children, were raising children and maintaining a career as a scientist, career challenges and future steps, how their careers impacted the number of children they chose to have, balancing their career and their spouse's career/household duties and other topics.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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