

March 8, 2012

## **Work-Life Balance Is Out of Reach for Many Male and Female Scientists**

*By Audrey Williams June*

A survey of scientists and researchers working in countries across the globe has found that both women and men find work-life balance elusive as they toil away at institutions they don't perceive as family-friendly.

How tough is their struggle? More than half of the survey's 4,225 respondents said work demands conflict with their personal lives at least two to three times a week. Forty-eight percent of women are unhappy with the way their work life meshes with their personal life, compared with 39 percent of men. And of the scientists who planned to leave their positions within the next year, 9 percent of them said a lack of work-life balance is driving them out.

"This is not a gender issue, this is atmosphere-related," said Donna J. Dean, an independent consultant who provided a preliminary analysis of the data from [the survey](#), a project of the Association for Women in Science. "Both men and women are struggling with this."

Most research on work-life balance in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—the so-called STEM fields—tends to focus on women. Indeed, the pressure-filled road to tenure, involving publishing, grant-writing, and long hours in the lab, has often caused women to second-guess their career choice, abandon their desire to have children, or ultimately leave the field.

But even though women do bear the brunt of the challenges that arise from working in the male-dominated STEM fields, efforts to make the academic workplace more family-friendly for scientists will keep falling short as long as women are allowed to serve as the primary faces of work-life balance gone awry, association officials said.

"Let's stop pointing the finger at women by putting a 'baby' Band-Aid on the problem and solve the real issues," said Janet Bandows Koster, the association's executive director.

Only one out of three researchers reported that they worked for a family-friendly institution. Those who didn't work for such an institution said that policies for spousal or family support didn't exist, in some instances, because of budget cuts. And those who pushed for more work-life balance anyway say that it didn't always pay off.

According to the survey, one-third of researchers who do that believe it hurt their careers. Women were more likely than men to hold that belief.

Women were also more likely to put off having children because of their careers. Nearly 40 percent of women said they short-circuited their childbearing plans, compared with 27 percent of men who said their careers stood in the way of starting a family. According to an executive summary of the survey's results, some women said they made too little money to start a family or that they wanted to wait until they had a permanent position.

"One of the really important inroads that have been made so far is that we're actually talking about this as an issue," said Ms. Dean, a former president of the association.

The survey, underwritten by Elsevier, was conducted in December and January. Respondents, limited to those who publish academically, live in Western Europe, North America, Asia Pacific, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Sixty-four percent of them are employed at universities, while others work in industry, or at nonprofit or government research institutes.

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