

FAMILY PLANNING IN ACADEMIA

A policy recommendation on facilitating temporary academic staff in starting or expanding a family



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INTRODUCTION

This policy advice is written in response to a research question from the Gender & Diversity committee of the Faculty of Science (FNWI) within Radboud University, for the purpose of better facilitating temporary academic staff in starting or expanding a family. Currently, within FNWI relatively little academics use arrangements concerning parenthood compared to other faculties within Radboud University. Therefore, a comparison was made with the Faculty of Management Sciences (FdM) where more academics use these arrangements. In this policy advice we briefly present the results regarding the factors that influence family planning among temporary academic staff and make recommendations to improve this where possible. These results are based on the outcomes of two master's theses, conducted in the Master Public Administration, which focus on female and male academics, respectively. The outcomes were collected using a mixed methods research design. On the one hand, a survey was administered to employees of FNWI and FdM and analyzed using regression analysis. On the other hand, in-depth interviews were conducted with academics on temporary contracts working at FNWI and FdM.

FEMALE ACADEMICS

What factors influence family planning among female academics on temporary contracts? First of all, the attitude of female academics towards starting or expanding a family influences family planning, namely the extent in which they have a desire to start or expand a family in the near future. This mainly concerns the combination of work and family. Our research shows that if female academics are predominantly extrinsically motivated, this has a positive effect on family planning. Given the fact that extrinsically motivated academics see their career as a separate goal that can be achieved, they will be more willing to make concessions in order to start or expand a family.

A second factor is the social environment of female academics. The data shows that family plays an important role in offering child care support. At the same time, Dutch science is becoming more international. An increasing number of foreign academics work at Dutch universities and it is increasingly expected that Dutch scientists will also work abroad. When female academics have an international background it is likely that their families do not live nearby. This makes it harder for their families to provide childcare support, which has a negative effect on family planning. As far as FNWI is concerned, a relatively large number of academics are of foreign origin, which may explain the lower take-up of maternity and parental leave. Furthermore, the interviews show that having a relationship in which the partner takes on a relatively larger proportion of care tasks is supportive for family planning. Such a relationship structure departs from the two-earner relationship structure and from traditional gender roles, which allows for a division of care responsibilities that pursues women's academic careers.

Finally, job insecurity of female academics affects family planning, particularly financial stability and not having a permanent contract. In general, academics have little influence on the type of contract and this creates uncertainty about financial stability. By the time security in the form of a permanent contract is achieved, female academics may have reached an age where it is more difficult to start or expand a family.

MALE ACADEMICS

Academia is characterized by a hierarchical pyramid structure, in which academics compete for an increasingly limited number of academic positions as they progress through their careers. As a result, male academics experience a great deal of performance pressure at work. Having a permanent position helps; the constant pressure to perform is mitigated by the knowledge that one's academic position is secure. This performance pressure has a negative effect on family planning of male academics, in part because there is too little time left to take care of a child in addition to the working hours.

A second area of concern is the mobility of male academics. They regularly travel and move to locations at home and abroad. Male academics indicate that in doing so they run the risk of being separated from their partner and family. This risk is certainly present for families where both partners work in science. They have no guarantee of getting a positions at the same or neighboring scientific institutes. These families face a dilemma: live separately or sacrifice the scientific career.

Finally, male academics with temporary positions often seem to have poor knowledge about the existence of schemes that can facilitate fatherhood. Especially younger academic staff seems to be less aware of arrangements in the collective agreement and specific to Radboud University. If they are not well informed about existing schemes, they cannot make use of them either. For example, postdocs may ask for a contract extension when taking paternity leave, but not all postdocs seem to know that they may ask for a contract extension. Furthermore, it is not obligated to grant this extension because of different financing rules between positions.

Comparing the results of the two theses, we see that generally speaking female academics experience more restrictions from the temporary contract in wanting to start or expand a family than male academics. This is probably due to the greater impact of starting or expanding a family and the expected care responsibilities on women's careers. Nevertheless, we also see these constraints playing a role in the attitude male academics have in planning to start a family. In addition, this uncertainty seems to be stronger among PhD-lecturers (relatively common in the Management Faculty) and among post-docs and temporary assistant professors who are older (above 30) and therefore more likely to want to start or expand a family in the near future.

Recommendations

The recommendations regarding facilitating temporary academic staff in starting or expanding a family are as follows:

- All academics on temporary contracts should have the option to extend the term of employment by the length of parental leave taken. Thus, this should also apply to PhD-lecturers and post-docs, for example. This is a political and financial decision we should push for.
- A *Junior Faculty Community* can be organized for young parents, with the aim of connecting and informing young parents. In this community academics can, for example, be reminded of their rights regarding parenthood and share experiences with each other.
- Academics need to be informed proactively about changes in policies, laws and regulations regarding parenting. This can be facilitated from a faculty-specific counter.

- Managers need to be trained periodically on relevant laws and regulations so that they can inform and speak to their employees about them.
- Experiments should be designed and facilitated in such a way that it is no longer necessary for academics to come to the university on weekends, up to twice a day, in order for them to run smoothly. Which is mainly done by temporary academic staff.
- Academics should be compensated for unpaid overtime on weekends (for example for educational activities for prospective students) with a comparable number of hours off during the week. Extra weekend work should lead to a comparable decrease in workload during the working week to compensate for missed family time.