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Women in Academia and the Burden of Successful Parenting

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ABSTRACT - *Responsive parenting is crucial for development of children's attachment style. Securely attached children, can build a more empathetic society in the future. Despite academic freedom, the nature of academic work is highly competitive. In Eastern European cultures, where the mentality still prevails that caring for children is mainly a task for women, this places great demands on women who also pursue an academic path. The aim of the study was to define their views on juggling the role of mother and academic career. A qualitative study was conducted to outline women's views and experiences of combining an academic career and motherhood. The data consisted of semi-structured interviews with 8 women working as academics at the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and 6 women at the University of Brno (Czech Republic), at different stages of academic careers, but all having children. All participants were assured anonymity. The study findings suggest that academic world in the studied countries is not parent friendly, so that women find themselves in a balancing act between the role as mothers and their roles and responsibilities as academics, resulting in a constant feeling of double guilt as they feel they are falling short at both ends.*

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KLJUČNE BESEDE: *akademsko kariero, stili navezanosti, feminizem, materinstvo, vloga ženske v družbi.*

POVZETEK – *Rahločutno starševstvo je predpogoj za razvoj varne navezanosti pri otroku. Taki posamezniki bodo odrasli v empatične odrasle. Kljub akademski svobodi je delo v visokošolskem okolju tekmovalno. V vzhodnoevropskih kulturah, kjer še vedno ženska prevzame večji delež skrbi za gospodinjstvo in vzgojo otrok, so ženske z akademsko kariero postavljene v neenak položaj. V raziskavi smo želeli pridobiti uvid v percepcijo visokošolskih učiteljic in sodelavk z majhnimi otroki. Izvedena je bila kvalitativna študija o izkušnjah žensk, ki si ustvarjajo akademsko kariero, obenem pa vzgajajo majhne otroke. Izvedeni so bili polstrukturirani intervjuji z 8 ženskami, zaposlenimi na Univerzi v Ljubljani, ter 6 akademičarkami z Univerze Brno. Ženske so bile na različnih stopnjah karierni poti. Zagotovljena jim je bila popolna anonimnost. Akademski svet v državah, ki smo ju proučevali, ni družinam prijazen. Vse ženske, vključene v raziskavo, so spregovorile o večnem »žongliranju« med vlogo matere in odgovornostmi, ki jih imajo kot akademičarke. Izražen je bil stalen občutek krivde in stresa, da svojih nalog ne opravljajo dovolj dobro. O občutkih neenakosti, ki jih te ženske izražajo, bi bilo potrebno javno spregovoriti.*

1 Introduction

Parenting can be rewarding, but it can also be stressful in some aspects. It is of crucial importance that parents are sensitive to the child's needs, because only parents who are constantly response empathetic to the child can provide an environment for optimal psychological development. Successful attachment and parental responsiveness to the child are of great importance for the development of the child's personality.

This also affects his/her interaction style and relationships in adulthood. Therefore, devoted parenting is a principal key to the mental health of the next generation (Bowlby, 2010).

However, it is sometimes challenging for mothers to remain calm and empathetic when other aspects of life stress them out too much. Women who are often professionally engaged, face the task of motherhood strategically – they plan the pregnancy carefully and can feel trapped by the new social role. Caring for the newborn can be stressful because of the repetitive and monotonous everyday activities, and these feelings can also create feelings of loss – loss of professional identity, previous lifestyle and autonomy.

For a mother, there are two essential elements of the motherhood constellation that are constantly in play – permanent sense of responsibility and the need to establish unique relational bonds with her child (Bruschweiler - Stern, 2009). This new important life role of parenting can be seen as incompatible due to the constant heavy obligations for personal professional development in the field of academia. The aim of this article is therefore to parallel these phenomena and find out how women, who are developing an academic career perceive the transition to motherhood in relation to their work environment.

The balance between being a good parent and a successful academic

The transition to motherhood is described as a unique experience of each individual, affected by cultural context, personal background, as well as current life situation (Raynor and England, 2011). There are biological processes of conception, pregnancy, childbirth and lactation that allow mothers to transition to motherhood. Beyond biology, there are also psychological and behavioural changes that accompany the transition to parenthood (Quatraro and Grussu, 2020).

Role conflict in mothers is often the result of competing demands on their time to care for children and perform other roles in their daily lives and can lead to stress and anxiety (Raynor and England, 2011). Being a ‘good enough parent’ requires patience, commitment, flexibility, resilience and the ability to respond not only to the physical needs of the baby, but also to the developmental needs of the infant and to the emotional, social, behavioural and cognitive needs of an infant and a teenager.

Although men play a more active role in the family nowadays, the tasks of parenthood are still mainly the responsibility of women in Central-Eastern Europe. Although people are aware of the changes in society, there is still a traditional view of male/female role division in the family in the culture (Jug Došler and Skubic, 2012). The fact is that women can make choices about how they want to live their lives both personally and professionally, but these choices are at least partially constrained by societal and institutional expectations about what women should do in the best interest of their families and careers. Institutional expectations about what it means to be a good professor combine with gendered expectations about what it means to be a good mother and these two norms clash and influence the choices women make (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2012).

Mead (1962 as cited in Wortis, 2014) has long challenged the provincialism of studies of mother-child interaction. She emphasised that conscious care for the infant is cultural not biological. The assumption that the biological mother must be the primary responsible adult in the infant's life is closely related to the theory that women have a maternal instinct : that women have bio-psychological predispositions to care for children (Bruschweiler - Stern, 2009). But they can freely devote themselves to children only if at the same time they do not feel deprived of other meaningful pursuits that are part of their identity (Gail, 1968 as cited in Wortis, 2014). For example, if a woman is torn between obligations to children and obligations to career development, she may feel crucified. Modern psychology, with its emphasis on individual advancement, personal achievement and egocentric individual development, discredits caring and sacrifice for others (Wortis, 2014).

Transition to motherhood - a crucial and challenging task

Epifanio et al. (2015) point to the transition to parenthood as a developmental crisis that affects not only new mothers but also new fathers. Thus, it can be said that the transition to parenthood, like all psychological crises, albeit developmental or accidental, brings a lot of uncertainties and opens the way for many misunderstandings and inaccurate attributions (Bruschweiler - Stern, 2009).

Women who return to work after childbirth are confronted with a completely different self-image than before pregnancy. And this is so despite the fact that motherhood is considered by some authors to be an essential feature of women's lives and one of the universal roles assigned to women. But they all agree that regardless of the changing roles of men and women in families in postmodern society, women are still the main caregivers (Raynor and England, 2011).

Because of this tendency, women are faced with the artificial choice of devoting themselves to their working lives or to their babies, even though they often want both; possibly with good reason, as the importance of not having only one source of identity and existential value has often been emphasised (Isebaert, 2016). However, it is true that babies need their mothers in the first months of life and women are almost irreplaceable. The human baby is still very much part of the mother's body, both physiologically and psychologically (Gerhardt, 2015), some even write about the fourth trimester of pregnancy to emphasise the importance of the mothering role during the postnatal period (Johnson, 2017).

Because of the inherently stressful nature of new parenthood, it is of crucial importance for mothers to network with other adults. Therefore, returning to work can be beneficial for mothers in terms of regaining a social network. On a broader social level, Gerhardt (2015) believes that the real source of many parenting difficulties is the separation of work and home, public and private, which can lead to isolation for mothers. Therefore, socialising with colleagues can be seen as positive for young mothers, even in an academic work environment, provided the work environment is supportive and benevolent towards young parents.

Unequal position of women in the academic world

A review of the literature suggests that the increase in the amount of time a woman invests in education or career training in the case of an academic career takes its toll on the time available for child rearing. Due to misconceptions about fertility, many of those who intended to postpone having children inevitably end up unintentionally childless. A recent pan-European study found that given the challenge of combining having children with active and successful engagement in the labour market, late motherhood may be a way for women to delay the labour market costs of having children (Bratti et al., 2017). One study presents evidence that possible negative effects of combining motherhood and career goals are related to policies and institutions in different countries, with a clear difference between countries without family-friendly policies and more traditional societies on the one hand, and smaller countries that actively promote gender equality on the other.

On the contrary, those who choose to have children alongside an academic career often experience conflict between contradictory discourses – being a ‘successful academic’ and being a ‘good mother’. The consequences of this role conflict can be profound – for example feelings of guilt about not fulfilling one role properly – and often stem from a lack of time to perform both roles to either their own or externally imposed standards of excellence (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2012), which can lead to burnout, depression or anxiety. Evidence of this can be found, for example, in the fact that men in academia publish more than women with children under the age of ten, whereas women whose children are all 10 or older publish as often as men (Morgan et al., 2021). In Slovenia, the rate of female professors is still very low – 32% in 2017 (Adrinek and Ratej, 2019) and we have not come across the study of how many of Slovenian professors have children.

Taking on two very responsible and time-consuming roles can be overwhelming. Juggling an intellectual careers and childcare has been linked to both burnout and depression in recent years (Mezu - Chukwu, 2017; Morgan, 2017; Nelson and Combe, 2017). Yet, it seems to be a natural decision for women to choose to have a child despite having a demanding career.

In postmodern society, the idea of motherhood as a key element of a family has at least been affected by changing social norms and values. However, motherhood still seems to be seen as essential to building and maintaining a successful family life (Warner, 2008). The reason for this is the biologically inspired and culturally shaped perception of mothers as healers, caregivers and nurturing individuals. Social attributes tied to nature (especially in the context of reproduction) appear to be constant and unchanging.

It has been argued that the discussion of working mothers is merely politically structured and can be seen mainly as a feminist sociological issue. However, when it comes to the context of family and children, it also has clear psychological implications; not only for the individual parent and child, but also in terms of building healthy family relationships that have implications for the future development of society as a whole (securely attached children, develop better relationships in adulthood). There-

fore, as a key element of primary socialisation in a family, child rearing can be considered an important task from both a micro and macro perspective. However, a sense of professional achievement is also crucial to a woman's self-image and self-fulfilment. There is more to an academic career than tenure-line advancement and there is more to parenthood than caring for children – career and parenthood are lifelong propositions (Ward and Wolf - Wendel, 2012) and existential sources of happiness.

Central-East Europe context (using Slovenia, Czech Republic and Slovakia as examples)

We have decided to study the Central-East European context because they have a strict renewal process of academic titles (every five years) with high academic standards that Western countries usually do not have (for example the UK). The similarity of the countries studied is also the relatively same length of independence status.

The employment rate of Slovenian women is around 61% (Eurostat, 2013), in Czech Republic about 65.6% (72% for women with tertiary education) (ČSÚ, 2019). In the population of women with children under 6 years of age, the female employment rate is significantly lower, at 42.6%. Parenting is the most important factor affecting women's employment. To support a family with only one salary would be financially almost impossible, because of low socio-economic status (Inštitut RS za socialno varstvo, 2015). Of the women who stay employed even if they have children, 84.8% have one child, 89.1% have two children and 79.3% of women have three or more children. This proportion is high compared to Western countries – in Western EU countries, on average, only 54.7% of women with three or more children stay in work (Statistical Agency, 2011).

Based on these facts, it could be argued that the influence of a patriarchal family, which was a strong feature of the traditional family, has waned and that women have equal opportunities to work outside the private sphere. But women still do most of the housework, especially the work related to caregiving (Humer and Kuhar, 2010), including the care of the children, in addition to paid work. Despite the possibility of paternity leave (paid or unpaid) that men have, 20% of men do not even use the fully paid 15 days after the birth of the child. Only 1 in 6 Slovenian men use the additional 75 unpaid days of parental leave to which they are entitled (Zalaznik, 2013). Only about 2% of men take advantage of parental leave in the Czech Republic. And a similar proportion in Slovakia as well.

Women in Slovenia have 105 days of maternity leave (28 days before and the rest after birth). During this time, the substitute for salary is 100%. After that, parents can use 260 days of parental leave to take care of the baby (this period is paid but does not fully replace the salary) – these days can be shared between the mother and the father (Frigelj and Kožar, 2021), but only 7% of Slovenian men used this option in 2012. Also, when children are sick, women are the parent who stays at home to take care of them in 79.8% of cases (Zalaznik, 2013). The maternal employment of mothers in Slovakia in the first three years of the child's life lags significantly behind EU and OECD countries, which has a negative impact on the financial well-being of families, write

Hidas and Horváthová (2018). In Czech Republic maternity leave is 28 weeks and is compensated at 70% of the original wage and the three-year parental leave in Czech Republic is one of the longest in Europe. Only 1% of Czech men use parental leave (Bičáková and Kalíšková, 2015). The situation is similar in Slovakia.

After the child's first year, a large proportion of women with higher education and scientific ambitions return to work, since a long interruption in professional development can lead to disadvantages in creating an academic career (Gallardo, 2021). They can choose to enrol their children in kindergarten, where children are admitted when they are at least 11 months old. The price of kindergarten is calculated on the basis of family's possession (MDDSZ, 2014). Fees are higher for children under 3 years of age, because the groups are smaller and care for these children is considered more demanding. Statistically, there is not enough space for all children in kindergartens nationally (Nakrst, 2014), so municipalities define specific criteria for admission (Zalaznik, 2015). Besides kindergarten, another option for childcare is private babysitting, however this possibility is not affordable for everyone. The third option is babysitting by relatives, usually grandparents. During the years of economic crisis, which brought many social challenges for young families, many Slovenians choose this type of childcare (Humer and Kuhar, 2010).

Slovenian as well as Czech and Slovak women are well educated. The number of women with tertiary education is increasing. In Slovenia, 60% more women than men graduated from tertiary education from 2002-2010. However, if we look at the figures for postgraduate education (MSc and PhD level) in general, the proportion of men was higher (SURS, 2011). However, this may change in the future, as the proportion of women with postgraduate education in Slovenia is increasing, especially when looking at the younger generations (SURS, 2013). In 2011, there were approximately 40% female academics, if we look at the figures for the EU (Lukič, 2013). Women entering this field usually deal with social sciences, such as healthcare, sociology, languages, etc. (Kanjuo Mrčela, 2007); disciplines that enjoy a lower reputation than the natural sciences.

The academic career is a very uncertain career path. Universities in Slovenia practice very strict quantitative requirements for all academic titles; this is called the habilitation process (Univerza v Ljubljani, 2020). Although the specific requirements for the title of Associate professor and professor are different, this process is the same in other Central-East European countries, such as Slovakia and Czech Republic. Climbing the ladder from the position of assistant to professor is precisely outlined and very demanding. Every member of the university must renew his academic title every five years (regardless of whether he holds the same title or applies for a higher position). The exception is the professorship; this title is for life, so it is highly coveted, but also very difficult to obtain. With each title, the requirements become higher; the individual must prove himself in the field of research, pedagogically and from the aspect of international recognition. Each aspect has quantitative criteria.

With each title, the requirements are higher; the individual must prove himself in the field of research, pedagogically, and from the aspect of international recognition. Each aspect has quantitative criteria.

Despite the fact that the promotion processes are very transparent, there are still some inherent inequalities. Ule (2013a) writes of hidden discrimination against women that is very subtle - such as habilitation rules that are harder to achieve if you are female, or who is selected to be funded for the big research projects. Women rarely occupy strategic positions in the academic hierarchy. Ule (2013b) claims that women are underrepresented in terms of academic prestige and respect. In their study, 33.9% of female academics perceived gender discrimination and 26.3% of them felt disadvantaged due to family responsibilities.

Given the inherent difficulties of achieving a successful academic career in Slovenia, Slovakia and Czech Republic, accompanied by the prospect that the system already makes success more difficult for women than for men and the fact that the decision to have children still seems to have more of a negative impact on the careers of female academics than on the careers of their male counterparts, this study aims to qualitatively capture the experiences of female academics in terms of combining their desire to have children and their success as academics.

2 Material and methods

The authors were particularly interested in women's views regarding motherhood in the academic world. Advantages and disadvantages of working in academia during pregnancy and up to five years postpartum were the main research objectives.

A qualitative study was designed using semi-structured in-depth interviews that were transcribed verbatim. Participants were invited via an internal call (mail to working women with children). Inclusion criteria were: full time university employment, with children up to 5 years old, at least one experience of pregnancy and childbirth. Women working as academics at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia (n=8) and Czech Republic (n=6) who met the criteria, were invited for the interviews.

We wanted to include only women who were motivated to participate in our study. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasised and we assured participants of confidentiality. We conducted the in-depth interviews with respondents aged 30 to 45 years, with 1 (n=7) or 2 children (n=7), who were active in different areas of academic careers; employed full-time as academics (from assistants n=7, assistant professors n=6 to professors n=1). One of them was single, the others were in a committed relationship.

Data were collected from June to September 2016. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions derived from the literature review. They included demographic data, participants' self-evaluation of academic success and their aspect of the advantages and disadvantages of academic work on their family life (especially after

having children). The length of the interviews varied from 20 to 60 minutes. Field notes were taken during the interview and the interviews were recorded.

Transcriptions were then made and the transcripts were reviewed by a second person. The identities of the respondents were coded. We identified relevant themes, codes and common patterns from the transcripts. The answers were generalised through the analysis process using the hermeneutic approach. We used the hermeneutics because it emphasizes a detailed examination of the text and therefore presents a deeper understanding of the object under study (Silverman, 2017).

3 Results and discussion

The two main themes (categories) that emerged from the participants' answers were: a) schedule and b) commitment to work versus commitment to children. The subthemes (codes) are discussed below.

Schedule – freedom is a cage

Faculty life is known for its autonomy; research work can be done anywhere and at almost any time (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2012). However, mothers may feel constant guilt resulting from not being available for their children at all times when they are at home. This duality of flexible working hours among the faculties was also emphasised by the participants. One of them (professor) said:

A1: “There is a positive thing that you can plan your work on your own as only fixed arrangements are pedagogic obligations and meetings. Flexible organisation of time is great.”

And another (assistant professor) added:

A2: “It is great that you can organise your work and have the possibility to work from home when you do not have obligations at the faculty and you can spread your work during the day ...”

There are also many other positive aspects of academic life mentioned by participants who held assistantships at the time, such as: *“possibility to make international contacts ... go to conferences”*, *“have diverse work”*, *“possibilities for creativity”* and *“learn new things all the time”*. But despite all these advantages, the work is still hard.

Work in academia invades in the private sphere. This downside of flexible working was also outlined by the respondents. As some assistant professors pointed out:

A3: “...the bad thing of this freedom is that you are actually at work in your mind all the time. And you are ruminating on the projects and problems from work and sometimes there is so much stress... that affects also the quality of relationship with your children – you are physically present, but not with your mind.”

B1: “...meaningful scientific work requires a lot of time and concentration...I never go home with a ‘clear’ head...”

Or:

A2: *"I bring home a lot of work - I correct exams at home, I usually read dissertation theses during weekends. Actually, I never have actual free time. This can be psychically quite tiring. And when I take a few hours off, I often feel guilty, because I do not engage with children. And vice versa, when I devote my time to them, I have guilty conscience due to not doing enough for work..."*

However, some of the work is fixed, very unadaptable and can therefore be perceived as stressful by participants:

A1: *"The obligations that are planned in advance (lectures and seminars) can be quite problematic; if you have pathological pregnancy or you go on the sick leave, there remains a problem who will do these engagements."* Said one assistant professor.

A similar point was also made by an assistant:

A2: *"Since everybody gets their fixed pedagogic obligations at the beginning of the study year, it is impossible to get sick when you have obligations scheduled. I have never (since I am employed at the faculty) been on the sick leave when my children were ill and I missed my work just once because of my bad health condition."*

Another bad side of the scheduled activities is the timing of the prescribed obligations, as one assistant professor pointed out:

A3: *"I have lectures in the afternoons, but I also have practical training in the morning, which means that sometimes I am away for the whole day. And I do not see my children for two or even more days."*

This can also be problematic from the organisational perspective of family life. In contrast to traditional culture, where mothers took their children to work or left them with other female relatives, women today (in societies where the nuclear family is the dominant structure of family life) leave children in the care of unknown people, in institutions especially designed for children rearing. Changes in the retirement age and the shortage of places in kindergartens have led to problems in organising childcare, which is particularly evident for children under 3 years of age. To some extent this can be compensated for by private centres, but these are very expensive. Being a single mother or having limited support from grandparents are significant barriers to employment/return to work for young mothers in all work sectors, not just academia (Hidas and Horváthová, 2018). As one of the participants (assistant professor) pointed out:

A3: *"Since my unusual timetable, it is hard to organise childcare. Kindergartens and private baby-sitting groups are not organised in the afternoons, when a lot of my obligations are scheduled. It took us (with the husband) quite heavy planning to solve this problem. We eventually put our daughter in a small private childcare for a few hours in the morning and our mothers helped us with care in the afternoon ..."*

Leaving the child with unknown people and partially tearing the bond after an intense relationship with the child has developed during maternity leave, can be very stressful and even painful for new mothers. Mothers who are aware of their child's

abilities and needs in the first three years (Brazelton and Bertrand, 2019) often opt for small group childcare. This can be a big burden for the family budget as salaries in the academic field are not high.

However, there seems to be a difference in having a child after you are already established in the academic sphere. The challenges are not homogeneous for mothers at different stages of their academic careers, yet the one thing that is constant is the dominant patriarchal frame (Castañeda and Isgro, 2013). People with the highest academic titles can be powerful enough to make their own rules – at home and at work. One of the participants, who already had a professorship when she had a baby, said:

A5: “I could set the timing of my working obligations freely, accordingly to the needs of my family and I have found this extremely helpful in order to be with my children when they needed me.”

The academic flexible schedule looks appealing to outsiders – work from home, supposed summer break, etc. Popular culture’s image of the professional workload suggests an ideal compatibility with having and raising children. The flip side, however, is that the work never ends and the rigid hierarchical career structure, with its emphasis on competition and individual achievement, can place a heavy demand on women. Freedom can also be perceived as a constraint, especially if one is highly motivated for the work, feels personally responsible for it and has a strong self-discipline. High personal commitment to work can be the best motivator, but it can also be dangerous (Elliot and Blithe, 2021) as it can lead to stress, burnout, anxiety or depression.

Commitment to work versus commitment to children – juggling two responsibilities and double guilt

Working in academia is uncertain as you have to constantly renew your status to prove your academic competence. This can place a great deal of psychological strain on young mothers (Mason, 2013), which can lead to health problems if this pressures continues for too long. The research assistant goes through a recruitment process every 5 years and defends their position. Emphasis is put on publications, participation in research projects as well as requirements for professional growth. During the last year, when the whole world was paralysed by the COVID-19 epidemic, most mothers stayed home with their children, when schools were closed. In the case of mothers in academia, instead of doing research during this time, you can already see the results of parenting. The study by Ribarovska et al. (2021) reports that female academics publish less than their male colleagues. Can we expect gender differences to become even more obvious if this pandemic continues? If so, it cannot be argued that the criteria for renewal of academic titles based on publications support equity.

One participant, who was an assistant at the time of the study:

A6: “The disadvantages are very strict conditions for renewing the academic title; there is a strong tendency for publishing, researching, studying...”

It is indeed dangerous to disengage from work for long periods of time, as one assistant professor noted:

A1: *"You cannot really be away; during my maternity leave I was at at least five meetings, because things are being scheduled for six months in advance. And any break that is too long can potentially damage your career in the long run (if you are not present at the time of reaccreditation of a programme, you might not be included in it, if you do not publish, you can have a serious problem, because you need to extend your title every five years – if you do not achieve this, you can lose the job)."*

There is not only work, but also self-study. In order to move up the academic ladder, one must obtain a doctorate in a certain amount of time and this can place a great burden on mothers, who are aware that without this requirement they will not be able to maintain their position in the profession. The issue was pointed out by several assistants:

B4: *"...it is not possible to combine the job requirements and requirements of doctoral studies with full childcare... this was one of my main reason for not completing the study; the priority for me was children and family..."*

Others decide differently:

B5: *"...I expect a shortened parental leave – with my first child I worked from 9 weeks of age, with the second from 5 months ..."*

Some criteria for professorship (such as lecturing abroad for several months) are more difficult to achieve for mothers of young children, as assistant professors pointed out:

B3: *"...inability to undertake a longer foreign internship (children would not benefit the mother's absence) results in a reduction of chances for further career growth and progress."*

And there is also pressure from within the faculty, since the institution is also measured by the success of its staff:

B4: *"The company does not perceive positively when I choose the role of the researcher and I then I commit to maternity..."*

So women juggle between the roles of mother and academic. This can be exhausting, however, as female assistants pointed out:

A6: *"The work in the academic sphere is not in favour of young mothers. I sometimes feel crucified. I feel guilty because I have a feeling that I cannot follow the colleagues who are childless, that there is no evident success of my working efforts... but on the other hand, I feel guilty because of my children – when I spend too much time at work, when I work from home to catch up... I sometimes feel double guilt – for not following the pace or for not being effective enough with children."*

It also takes a lot of sacrifice, as pointed out by another respondent:

A3: *"Since I do not want to keep my children from my active presence, I do a lot of work at night; I cannot remember the last time when I got enough sleep and did not feel tired."*

And as perceived by the majority of our respondents:

B6: *"Motherhood in general is perceived in (this) 'male world' as 'handicap'."*

Which also largely reflects on persistent inequality of gender roles in our cultures.

Obviously, despite the idea of increased equality, child rearing is still perceived mainly as a woman's task. Also among the participants of the study:

B1: "Most child and household care are usually on a woman... imbalance and stereotyped roles are still present in the culture. This means difficult career growth for a woman / mother - motherhood is in fact not considered as a significant contribution to society."

Tenure-track positions are also highly competitive and individualistic – it is an 'up or out' decision where everything is geared towards climbing the ladder to professorship (Ward and Wolf - Wendel, 2012). One participant, who was an assistant professor at the time of the study highlighted this aspect:

A8: "Finding the balance between the academic career and parenthood is challenging. I can say that my colleagues who work as academics are not supportive; academic sphere is not family-friendly. I claim that this is (also) the reason why a lot of women in academia do not decide for children."

Despite increasing support and implementation of family-friendly policies, attitudes in academia are still slow to change. One of the assistant professors also pointed out the potential inequalities created by the system, which particularly affects young women with children:

A7: "The inequality of the system is very visible when looking at estimation of the research success, which is evaluated every five years. Although there should only be the estimate for the active periods, this is not so. If you are not involved in certain projects – project carrier or mentorship of young research fellows... If a female researcher has one year of maternity leave in the five-year period..., she notionally has 20% worse research effectiveness than others."

We cannot say that academic rules are discriminatory against women, but they are certainly not parent-friendly. Furthermore, if we take into account a definition of gender discrimination that explains the term as any difference made on the basis of socially constructed gender roles, we can certainly call this phenomenon hidden gender discrimination (Kouta and Kaite, 2011).

And we could conclude with thoughts from our participants who are still at the beginning of their careers, but are already convinced:

B5: "I think that 100% gender equality in this area will never be achieved."

It could be that in this case equality could only be achieved with inequality; with unequal standards and criteria for young parents.

4 Conclusions

Choosing an academic career means consciously foregoing some personal choices – the institution constantly requires academics to prove their scientific achievements,

there are no regular working hours, employment is insecure. For academics working in the social and health sciences – e.g. midwifery, nursing, psychology, etc. – where motherhood is perceived as a particularly high value, this environment may be perceived as even more negative.

However, the topic seems to be relevant to women in other academic fields as well. Moreover, employment not only affects women's relationship with children, but can also have an impact on their health and romantic partnership.

It became clear in this study that these are challenging issues. It is impossible to draw conclusions based only on the research conducted by the authors, however, the research showed the importance of the topic, which is also increasingly discussed in the context of cultural, psychological and sociological views.

Although this paper focuses on women and motherhood, these circumstances can also be applied to men and fatherhood. With rapidly changing postmodern notions of fatherhood and the current trend towards reducing inequalities within households, particularly in relation to parenting, the topic can also be applied to young male academics with young families. The authors see this as a view that could be reflected in the following study.

More should be done to raise awareness of these issues in academic world, so that women do not leave the academic sphere or end up involuntarily childless or in burnout due to too many obligations in the private and public spheres. This paper aims to open a dialogue on this topic in order to find possible practical solutions for young parents in the academic world.

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Ženske v akademskem svetu in materinstvo

Rahločutno starševstvo je zelo pomembno za otrokovo duševno zdravje in njegov osebnostni razvoj. Varno navezani otroci odrastejo v empatične posameznike, ki bodo tvorili družbo z zdravimi medosebnimi odnosi. Iz tega lahko povzamemo, da sta starševstvo in vzgoja otrok izjemnega pomena. V določenih kulturah je vzgoja otrok še vedno v pretežni meri naloga matere; to ji nalagajo pričakovanja družbe in ženska pričakovanja družbe ponotranji. V primeru, da ima ženska, ki postane mati, še odgovorno in zahtevno službo, se nemalokrat lahko počuti ujeto v vlogi matere, ki ji nalaga veliko odgovornost. V sebi lahko zazna konflikt vlog – tekmo med zahtevami vzgoje otroka in željami po ustvarjanju akademske kariere.

Akademska sfera je bila nekoč svet moških. Danes se ta trend spreminja, saj na akademsko pot vstopa veliko žensk. Kljub temu kriteriji napredovanja niso prijazni do žensk, ki so matere – kot primer vzemimo zahtevo po 3-mesečni mednarodni izmenjavi, ki je pogoj za profesuro. Za večino žensk z majhnim otrokom je zahteva po ločenosti od

družine za tri mesece skorajda nemogoča. Ne glede na akademsko svobodo, ki omogoča večjo samostojnost pri razporejanju dela, akademska pot ostaja zahtevna, tekmovalnost je velika. Daljša odsotnost (npr. zaradi izrabe porodniškega dopusta) lahko pomeni izgubo stika z razvojem discipline in slabšo možnost za napredovanje po akademski lestvici nazivov. Zato velika večina akademičark dela tudi v času porodniške odsotnosti od doma. Delo akademikov se tako močno zariva v zasebno sfero – v čas za ukvarjanje z otroki in družinsko življenje. Občutek, da si »dober starš«, se navadno navezuje na to, da si potrpežljiv, predan, fleksibilen, na trenutke odločen in strikten, se odzivaš na otrokove potrebe, in to ne samo fizične, pač pa tudi emocionalne, kognitivne, socialne in druge, da se dojenček, otrok, najstnik uspešno razvija. Diskrepanca med »biti dobra mama« in »biti dober akademik« je pogosto prisotna v mislih žensk ter v njih vzbuja občutke nezadostnosti, kot kaže pregled literature. Dokazi študij kažejo, da moški z majhnimi otroki, ki so zaposleni v akademskem svetu, publicirajo več kot pa akademičarke z otroki, mlajšimi od deset let. »Zgodnji otroci« (izraz uporablja strokovna in znanstvena literatura za tiste otroke, ki se rodijo, preden posamezniki pričnejo graditi akademsko kariero) ne vplivajo na napredovanje po lestvici akademskih nazivov v primeru moških, močno pa vplivajo na razvoj akademske kariere žensk.

Dandanes so visoko izobražene ženske tiste, ki se po rojstvu otroka najpogosteje vrnejo na delo, navadno še v predšolskem obdobju otroka. Večina je pred porodom že imela uveljavljeno kariero. K temu, da se vrnejo v službo, jih žene notranja motivacija, želja po uveljavitvi in pripadnost stroki (profesionalna identiteta) in ne finančni razlogi.

Percepcija žensk, da je vzgoja otroka primarno njihova odgovornost, je neredko vsajena vanje že v času primarne socializacije. Pričakovanja družbe glede materinstva so tudi v obdobju postmoderne relativno nespremenjena, čeprav je na področju delitve vlog v gospodinjstvu zaznati spremembe. Razlog za take družbene norme in vrednote je biološke narave – da so matere negovalke, skrbne in najbolj primerne za vzgojo otrok.

Cilj naše raziskave je bil dobiti vpogled v percepcije visokošolskih učiteljic in so-delavk, ki gradijo akademsko kariero in imajo majhne otroke. Glede zahtevnosti akademske kariere smo pod drobnogled vzeli Slovenijo in Češko, obe centralno vzhodni državi, kjer družba še vedno pričakuje večji angažma ženske v vzgoji otrok. Podobnost držav je, da imata obe stroge habilitacijske pogoje za obnovitev akademski nazivov, česar v zahodnih državah (npr. v UK) ni zaslediti. Poleg tega so ženske obeh držav visoko izobražene (delež žensk z doktorskimi nazivi je visok in raste) in se vse pogosteje odločajo tudi za akademske kariere. Večina žensk v teh dveh državah se po rojstvu otroka vrne v službo, torej ne ostanejo doma in ne skrbijo za gospodinjstvo.

Lahko bi rekli, da so se z možnostjo dela v javni sferi ženske otresle ostankov tradicionalnega patriarhalnega odnosa. Vendar pa ženske v proučevanih državah, glede na raziskave, poleg plačanega dela izven doma opravijo tudi večinski delež v gospodinjstvu in pri vzgoji otrok. Kljub možnosti izrabe porodniškega dopusta s strani obeh staršev še vedno v večini ženske ostajajo doma enajst mesecev po porodu in v primeru, da otrok zbolí, so one tiste, ki ostanejo doma in skrbijo zanj. V tekmovalnem svetu akademskega

razvoja lahko te majhne podrobnosti ustvarjajo velike razlike. Ni torej čudno, da na univerzah zasedajo ženske manj kot petino visokih položajev. In velika večina nima otrok. Ali se torej starševstvo in akademska kariera izključujeta? Katere so največje ovire? Želeli smo pridobiti uvid v percepcijo akademičark z majhnimi otroki.

Uporabljen je bil kvalitativni pristop, saj smo želeli dobiti uvid v razmišljanja, stališča in izkušnje žensk, ki so matere in ustvarjajo akademsko kariero. Podatki so bili zbrani z individualnimi polstrukturiranimi intervjuji. Vprašanja so bila sestavljena na podlagi predhodnega pregleda literature. Intervjuji so bili izvedeni z 8 ženskami, zaposlenimi na Univerzi v Ljubljani, in 6 ženskami z Univerze v Brnu. Udeleženske so se na povabilo odzvale prostovoljno. Imele so različne nazive (7 asistentk, 7 docentk in 1 redna profesorica) različnih disciplin. Stare so bile od 30 do 45 let. Vse so imele otroke (7 jih je imelo enega, 7 pa dva otroka) in so bile polno zaposlene na univerzi. Vse razen ene so živele v partnerski zvezi.

Intervjuji, ki so v povprečju trajali 10 minut, so bili snemani in pozneje transkribirani ter prevedeni v angleški jezik. Prevod je bil dvojno preverjen. Identiteta udeleženk je bila prikrita z uporabo kod. S pomočjo hermenevitičnega pristopa so bile iz vseh zapisov generalizirane kode in kategorije.

Iz analize pogovorov sta bili izluščeni dve glavni vsebinski kategoriji. Prva se je nanašala na urnik, kjer bi pripovedovanja udeleženk lahko opisali s kodo »svoboda je kletka«. Akademsko razporejanje časa nudi svobodo, a lastno zavedanje ti vseeno prinaša odgovornosti, ki so omejujoče. Druga kategorija se je nanašala na predanost. Kodo, ki izvira iz te kategorije, bi lahko opredelili kot »dvojna odgovornost – dvojna krivda«. Ženske se zavedajo pomena obeh svetov in so v precepu, katerega postaviti kot prioriteto.

Ugotovili smo, da udeleženke cenijo možnost dela od doma, ki jo nudi univerza. To jim omogoča, da so določene dni, ko nimajo kontaktnih obveznosti na fakulteti, doma. Po drugi strani pa navajajo, da se na tak način službene obveznosti večkrat zajedajo v čas, ki je namenjen družini, in da obvezni delovni čas 40-ih ur na teden večkrat presežejo. Omenile so tudi organizacijo dela, ki večkrat zahteva njihovo pristnost na fakulteti v popoldanskih in večernih urah, ko skupinsko varstvo otrok ni organizirano. Nekatero udeleženke so zato plačevale zasebna varstva, da so lahko izpolnile službene obveznosti. Še zlasti problematično je bilo, če je tudi partner opravljal delo, ki ni bilo omejeno le na dopoldanski čas, ali v primeru, ko so bile samohranilke. V primeru, da so se za otroke odločile po tem, ko so že imele naziv redne profesorice, je bilo usklajevanje lažje. Stiske zaradi obnavljanja naziva ni bilo več, obenem pa so že imele pozicijo, ko so si lahko delo organizirale na tak način, da se je bolje umeščalo v njihov družinski urnik.

Kot je že bilo nakazano, velik stres, poleg pedagoškega dela, za mlade matere v visokošolskem prostoru predstavlja tudi obvezno obnavljanje nazivov, kar je povezano s strogimi habilitacijskimi postopki. Zavedajo se, da lahko kljub pogodbi za nedoločen čas ob izgubi naziva izgubijo zaposlitev. V tem oziru so izpostavile slabosti materinstva v povezavi z raziskovalnimi projekti, ki so pogoj za napredovanje v višje nazive (v primeru, da si na porodniškem dopustu, lahko izgubiš nosilstvo projekta). Druga

zahteva, ki jim je predstavljala frustracijo, pa so bile objave – v kolikor želiš napredovati oz. obnoviti višje nazive, je potrebno objaviti določeno število člankov v visokokakovostnih revijah. Omenile so, da pisanje prispevkov navadno ob vseh zahtevah dela pade v prosti čas, ki pa je v primeru skrbi za majhne otroke zelo omejen.

Ženske čutijo, da jim družba pripisuje aktivno vlogo pri vzgoji otrok. Ker so dobro izobražene, se zavedajo teže te odgovornosti. Visoko zastavljene cilje je težko doseči ob sočasni zahtevni službi. Delo v akademskem okolju zahteva polno osredotočenost, ki pa je otežena, če poleg tega skrbiš še za družino. Udeleženke so vzgajanje otrok ob sočasni akademski karieri opisovale z občutki »žongliranja«. Poročale so o stalnih občutkih krivde in neadekvatnosti; če so se več posvečale otrokom, so imele občutek, da jih kolegi prehitevajo, če so za prioriteto vzele službo, pa so imele občutek, da niso dobre mame. V akademskem svetu je fleksibilen delovni čas po eni strani prednost, po drugi strani pa se zariva v čas, ki naj bi bil namenjen družini; nočno delo je stalnica. Ves stres pušča posledice na duševnem zdravju. Smiselno bi bilo nadgraditi študijo z raziskavo o izgorelosti pri akademikih z majhnimi otroki.

Rezultati raziskave kažejo, da v proučevanih državah akademska sfera ni naklonjena starševstvu. Ker družba obeh držav še vedno smatra vzgajanje kot žensko vlogo, lahko hitro dojemamo te neenakosti kot neenakost spolov. Današnji očetje se sicer bistveno aktivneje vključujejo v vzgojo in varstvo otrok kot očetje v preteklosti, a njihova vloga še zdaleč ni enaka vlogi matere. Spreminjanje družbenih percepcij glede starševskih vlog je počasen in dolgotrajen proces. Zato bi bilo bolj smiselno redefinirati delovne pogoje in zahteve za akademsko srenjo in vzeti v ozir tudi pomen starševstva.

Omejitev študije je predvsem majhen vzorec, a vseeno rezultati nudijo pomemben uvid v problematiko. Večji vzorec bi omogočil generalizacijo, vendar menimo, da mora pristop ostati kvalitativen, ker omogoča, da subtilno zajamemo percepcije, ki morda niso vedno družbeno sprejemljive.

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