



Supporting pregnancy and early childcare in non-desk-based research work: co-designing meaningful strategies towards family inclusive research career pathways

Chiara Cocco

Heriot-Watt University

ABSTRACT

Although the impact of pregnancy and maternity in the working lives of women has been broadly explored in current studies, there is a lack of research around the career implications of pregnancy (including miscarriages and fertility journeys), breastfeeding and early childcare for women who conduct non-desk-based research, such as fieldwork and lab work, as substantial part of their job. This study aims at identifying the challenges related to family planning faced by researchers, exploring how they negotiate their wish to have a family with their pursuit of a research career, and understanding the mutual impact between these life events and career decisions. Research careers are often characterised by precarity, mostly affecting marginalised groups. Career progression for researchers is mostly achievable by securing funding and attaining to rigorous performance metrics which often make it inaccessible for women experiencing pregnancy, miscarriages, breastfeeding and childcare, especially in non-desk-based disciplines. After having identified barriers and existing practices in this area through a review of the extant literature, evaluation of current policies, and analysis of lived experiences (e.g., through interviews and ethnographic fieldwork), this exploratory study aims at co-designing strategies and practical tools to better support researchers to thrive in their chosen disciplines while pregnant, breastfeeding and/or caring for their child. This study contributes to the field of gender equality in the workplace, by proposing interventions to make research careers more accessible for those who wish to have a family, ultimately reducing the gender gap in currently male dominated disciplines.

Keywords: EDI, gender at work, family planning, co-design approach, qualitative research