

Invisible Labors, Visible Gaps: Gendered Experiences of Academic Life among Women Researchers from Romania

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Abstract

Despite increased attention to gender equity and efforts to recruit and retain women, inequality remains stark in academia (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012). Change is slow, and disparities persist (Mason et al., 2013). Even in seemingly meritocratic systems, opportunities remain unequal. Women often perceive academia as less welcoming (De Angelis & Grüning, 2020), and men are significantly overrepresented among top-performing scientists (Abramo et al., 2021).

This presentation draws on 37 in-depth interviews with women researchers from Romania to explore how their academic paths are shaped by institutional dynamics, gender bias, mentorship gaps, and caregiving responsibilities. Participants discuss career entry, promotion, mobility, and the balance between family life and academic identity. Alongside persistent structural challenges—such as unequal access to leadership roles and limited support—they describe resilience, self-organization, and informal solidarity.

The interviews reveal how academic ambition coexists with emotional labor, social expectations, and ongoing negotiations between public and private roles. Stories of burnout and doubt often coexist with those of agency and determination, particularly in contexts where women's voices remain underrepresented. Key themes are connected to broader literature on gender and academic labor, raising the question: Are today's higher educational institutions truly inclusive or merely symbolically diverse? By amplifying the voices of women researchers from Romania, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of gendered academic trajectories.

Keywords: women researchers; gender and academia; academic careers; qualitative research; Romania