

A Forgotten Class of Scientists: Examining the Parental and Family Benefits Available to Research Trainees

**Task Force on Parental and Family Leave for
Research Trainees**

**Federal Demonstration Partnership
Washington DC**

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- Our nation's scientific progress relies upon developing scientists and engineers.
- Research trainees rely on temporary placements — pre- and post-doctoral appointments — that do not consistently offer support and benefits afforded other researchers, including adequate parental and family leave.
- Trainees' benefits sometimes slip through the cracks between the federal funding agency and their academic institution of residence.
- This fragmented system can contribute to a perception that a research career is incompatible with having a family, further eroding the critical scientific workforce.
- These policies especially impact women researchers.

Prior research and policy development

- [*Gender Differences at Critical Transitions in the Careers of Science, Engineering, and Mathematics Faculty*](#) (NRC, 2010)

The effect of family roles on women's decisions to leave academic careers

- [*Staying Competitive: Patching America's Leaky Pipeline in the Sciences*](#), Marc Goulden, Karie Frasch, Mary Ann Mason (Center for American Progress, 2009)

Family-responsible policies at federal funding agencies and Universities, and recommendations for new policies

- [*Committee on Women, Science, Engineering and Medicine*](#) An interagency group has met to discuss best practices and consistent policies (www.nas.edu/cwsem)

Task Force Charge

The Federal Demonstration Partnership's Task Force on Parental and Family Leave for Research Trainees was charged with:

- providing information that enables federal agencies and universities to remove barriers for young people to become the next generation of scientific researchers; and
- providing information that can increase clarity and streamline processes for university administrators and federal agencies associated with parental and family leave for research trainees.

Report Contents

- Overview of predoctoral and postdoctoral research training in the United States.
- Federal regulations and policies related to parental and family leave benefits.
- Description of issues impacting parental and family leave benefits for research trainees.
- How academic institutions interpret policies with regard to predoctoral and postdoctoral research trainees and family and medical leave.
- Next steps, including a comprehensive collection of recommendations from federal agencies, researchers, academic institutions, and policy analysts to improve the implementation of family and medical leave for research trainees.

Relevant Federal Policies

- **Title VII of Civil Rights Act** (known as Pregnancy Discrimination Act; established pregnancy as protected status)
- **Title IX of Education Amendments of 1972** (prohibits discrimination on basis of gender)
- **Family Medical and Leave Act** (entitles employees to up to 12 weeks unpaid leave for family related purposes)
- **Circular A-21** (defines and clarifies costs that federal government can reimburse on sponsored project)

Who are Research Trainees?

- Funding mechanisms
 - Individual training grant (e.g., NIH F32)
 - Institutional training grant (e.g., NIH T32)
 - Supported by mentor's research grant
 - Other mechanism (private/foundation/internal)
- Limited appointment (1-5 years)
- May or may not be employee (NRSA not allowed to be employees)
- Unlikely to have paid family/medical leave (23% of postdoctoral researchers have 6 weeks paid leave following childbirth)

Factors influencing Benefits: Source/Type of Funding

- Many federal institutions handle on case-by-case basis
- Some allow leave only if offered to all in comparable positions
- If not employees, no employment benefits (e.g., FMLA)
- Family leave can be considered a fringe benefit by federal agencies to be reimbursed from indirect costs if academic institution policies allow

Factors influencing Benefits: Academic Institution Policies

- Institutions interpret regulations differently
- Multiple classifications of postdocs make it difficult for consistent benefits (e.g., T32s postdocs can't accrue sick/vacation; employee postdocs do) within and across institutions
- Different rules on fixed vs. accrued sick leave, leaves of absence, accommodations, withdrawal/reentry
- International Students
- Dependent care/child care

Summary of Recommendations

- Communicate and collaborate between federal agencies and academic institutions
- Research transition period, costs, efficacy of postdoctoral training
- Reform policies to require minimum benefits or employee benefits for postdocs
- Change climate to align institutional practices and policies to support scientists with families
- Increase outreach and dissemination to make postdocs aware of family accommodation policies and considerations with taking a postdoc.
- Provide support to universities, PIs, and postdocs regarding options for family-friendly policies.

Appreciation to a fantastic team

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Comments?
Questions?