Work-life balance (WLB) of female PhD-students in engineering

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Research problem
Low representation of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) WLB is still a great challenge Scarce research on PhD-students, though early socialization is vital (Mason et al 2013)

Research questions
RQ1: What work-related factors do female engineers identify in relation to their WLB? RQ2: What risks do they identify in relation to laboratory work? RQ3: How do all these factors affect the timing of childbearing?

Theoretical background

Findings

RQ1
Work-life balance-related factors
Long hours (-) Precarious employment (-) Flexibility (+) Chilly climate (-)
- Uncertain and heavy working conditions
- Both supportive and hostile environment
- Conflct of education / work and family life

RQ2
Laboratory work
General health risk Childbearing-related risks (conception, pregnancy, breastfeeding)
- Invisible and unpredictable risks
- Accidents always happen
- Cumulative effects

RQ3
Timing of childbearing
Before PhD: breaks the whole career During PhD: health risk After PhD: too late for motherhood
- „Least bad” option: during dissertation writing

Summary
- Work-to-family conflict during PhD education
- Laboratory work seriously affects WLB
- Dilemmas: academic or business career; no „ideal” period for childbearing

Conclusion
- Gendered individual and academic life courses a early as PhD education
- Occupational differences in WLB within STEM
- Postponed motherhood
- WLB and risks are shifted to individual responsibility
- Strong social support needed

Methodology
- 27 semi-structured interviews
- Chemical, electrical, informatics engineers
- From 2 doctoral schools in Budapest
- 24 work (18 public, 6 business sphere)
- 5 with children, 2 pregnant, 20 childless
- 7 single, 20 married or cohabits

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References