

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

Work-life balance theories
(Greenhaus – Beutell 1985, Clark 2000, Grzywacz – Marks 2000)

Risk society, uncertainty
(Beck 1992, Blossfeld et al 2005)

Findings

RQ1

Work-life balance-related factors

Long hours (-) Precarious employment (-)
Flexibility (- +) Chilly climate (-)

- Uncertain and heavy working conditions
- Both supportive and hostile environment
- Conflict 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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