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## Family Responsibilities in Academia: Premiums, Penalties, and Policies

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# **Family Responsibilities in Academia: Premiums, Penalties, and Policies**

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## **Conceptual Framework**

The proposed conceptual framework for understanding the career consequences of family responsibilities inside academia is based on concepts and theories from economics, sociology, and social psychology. The framework presented here is informed by the model presented in a review chapter on family responsibilities and career outcomes (Manchester, Leslie, & Dahm, 2015), which I developed closely with Lisa Leslie, and has been used to inform our subsequent work.

There are three main tenets of the framework. First, family responsibilities can be a source of career premium or career penalty in academia depending on the nature of the family responsibility. Namely, whether the responsibility centers on breadwinning as opposed to caregiving for related others. Having breadwinner responsibilities, or being perceived as having these responsibilities, for related others will lead to career premiums relative to faculty without family responsibilities. Alternatively, having caregiving responsibilities, or being perceived as having these responsibilities, for related others will lead to career penalties relative to those without family responsibilities. In the case of faculty, these caregiving responsibilities are unlikely to entail the direct provision of continuous, full-time care; however, faculty with caregiving responsibilities are (or perceived to be) primary caregivers within the household (i.e., responsibility for the full-time care of related others).

Second, the effect of family responsibilities on career outcomes is in part explained by differences in productivity between faculty with and without family responsibilities, which is based in resource utilization and availability. The dominant theoretical perspective is that of household specialization by which the family can achieve greater returns to human capital through specialization between breadwinner and caregiver (Becker, 1985). Specialization results in the allocation of resources within the household such that faculty members with breadwinner responsibilities would spend more time and effort on work relative to faculty without family responsibilities, while faculty with caregiving responsibilities would spend less time and effort on work relative to those without family responsibilities. Differences in time and effort directed towards work are assumed to translate into differences in productivity and, in turn, career outcomes.

Third, the effect of family responsibilities is in part explained by perceived differences stemming from discriminatory factors, or stereotypes connected to the roles of breadwinning and caregiving. One source of stereotype comes from the social role itself. Namely, social role theory argues that individuals are perceived to possess the traits necessary to succeed in the roles they occupy (Eagly, 1987). As such, faculty members in the breadwinner role are likely to be perceived as more competent and committed than those without family responsibilities, while faculty members in a caregiving role are expected to be more other-orientated and warm relative to those without family responsibilities. Further, those with caregiving responsibilities are also likely to be perceived as having lower competence and lower commitment relative to those without family responsibilities given that competence and commitment to work are perceived as incompatible with caregiving (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). These stereotypic attitudes are likely to affect career outcomes of faculty members given that competence and commitment are highly awarded (c.f. Correll et al., 2007), particularly in academia due to prevalence of the ideal worker norm (c.f. Manchester, Leslie, & Kramer, 2013). In addition, the ideal of distributive justice, which includes the principle of need-based justice (e.g., Leventhal, 1976; Deutsch, 1975), supports the desire by evaluators to grant rewards based on perceptions of need.

Therefore, perceptions of need may differ between those with and without family responsibilities (i.e., breadwinner perceived as having greater need, while caregivers perceived as having less need) which in turn may influence pay decisions (c.f., Pfeffer & Ross, 1982).

While gender is often considered a central factor for understanding career outcomes associated with family responsibilities (e.g., motherhood penalty, fatherhood premium, maternal role), the proposed framework focuses attention on the nature of family responsibilities, or role, rather than gender per se in understanding the consequences for career outcomes. This is consistent with recent work from the laboratory (Bear & Glick, 2017) and the field (Manchester, Leslie, & Dahm, 2019) shows that the same advantages accrue to primary-breadwinner employees regardless of gender. Therefore, a key aspect of the framework is highlighting the nature of the family responsibility – breadwinning or caregiving – in order to understand the consequences for career outcomes. That said, gender cannot be disconnected from assumptions about the type of family responsibility faculty are likely to fulfill or expected to fulfill (i.e., men as breadwinners, women as caregivers; Eagly & Steffan, 1984).

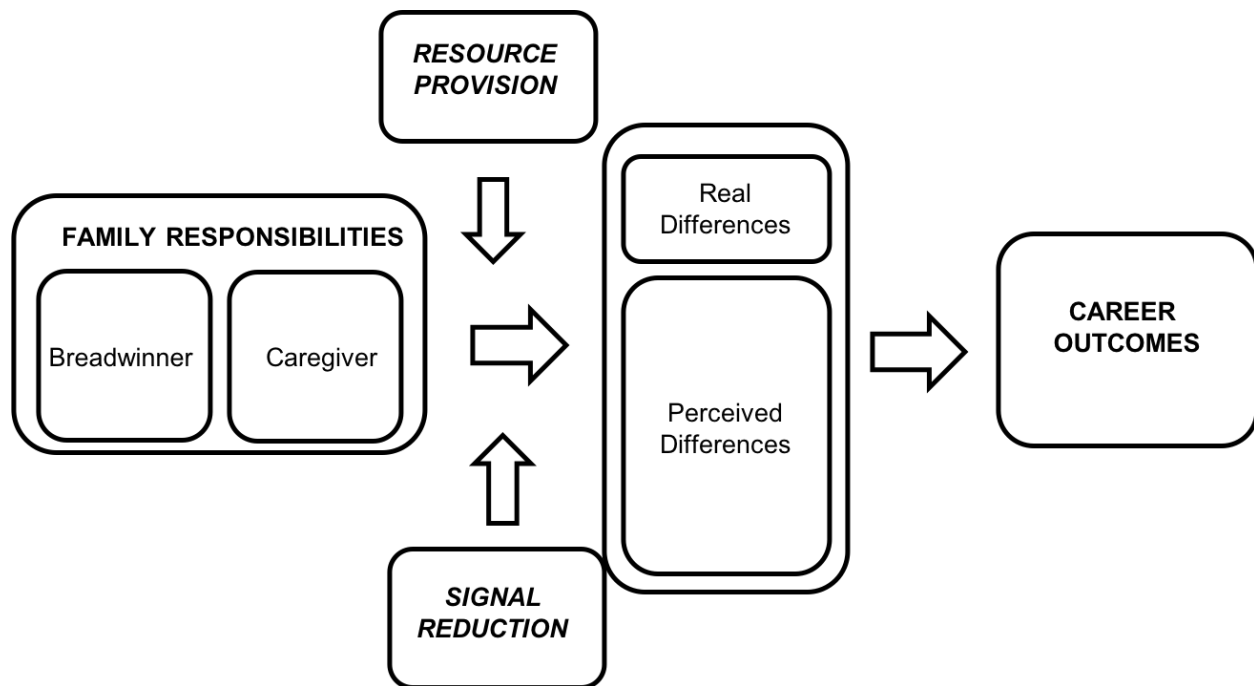


Figure 1: Family Responsibilities, Career Outcomes, and Policy Efforts

### Evaluating Framework with Empirical Evidence

How does this framework stack up against research both inside and outside of academia? A key finding from inside academia is that non-discriminatory factors (i.e., differences based in productivity) is not sufficient for explaining differences in career outcomes between those with and without family responsibilities. Stated differently, perceived differences, or those based in discrimination or stereotypes, are an important part of the relationship between family responsibilities and career outcomes.

Namely, research shows that stopping the tenure clock for family reasons results in a pay penalty relative to those who did not stop the clock over and above measures of productivity (i.e., quality and quantity of publications); this pay penalty is present for both men and women (Manchester, Leslie, & Kramer, 2013). More directly, research by King (2008) shows that senior colleagues' perceptions about junior faculty members' work and life attitudes predict career outcomes over and above self-reports of these attitudes by the junior faculty members. Relatedly, Kmec (2013) interprets the finding that women faculty with children in STEM fields report needing to put forth greater work effort as evidence of these women facing discriminatory attitudes about their competence and commitment. Further, research outside of academia questions actually calls into question whether there are real differences between those with and

without family responsibilities in terms of productivity-related factors. This includes studies based on reports of work effort (Kmec, 2011) and based on organizational records of performance (Manchester, Lelise, & Dahm, 2019).

While many studies look at differences by gender, my assessment is that the findings are likely best understood through the nature of the family responsibility– breadwinner versus caregiving – rather than gender. As an example, the penalty for stopping the clock for family reasons, which is likely seen as an indication of caregiver status, applies to both men and women (Manchester, et al., 2013). To the extent that gender matters, such as in the King (2008) study, it is likely operating through the social role men and women are expected to fulfill.

### **Where should universities target policy efforts?**

Based on the presented framework and reviewed evidence, I recommend that universities focus on two types of efforts to mitigate differences in career outcomes stemming from family responsibilities: signal reduction and resource provision.

Signal reduction implies assessing policies and practices from the lens of information signaling. Does the policy or practice activate stereotypes evaluators have about those with family responsibilities? Are evaluators likely to view policy use as a signal about a faculty member's current or future family responsibilities? For instance, stop the clock policies are likely to have different implications for career outcomes based on how access to the policy is structured. Do faculty members opt in, or is use automatically triggered based on certain events? Is eligibility broad, or limited? When policy use requires greater self-selection, evaluators are more likely to view use as an informative signal; alternatively, if there is the less scope for selection, then the signal is reduced or weakened. This idea holds for policies as well as types of employment (i.e., clinical faculty versus research faculty). Overall, designing policies and practices to reduce signaling attempts to directly mitigate perceived differences between those with and without family responsibilities.

Alternatively, resource provision is an indirect way to counteract negative stereotypes associated with caregiving responsibilities. Namely, providing faculty who have caregiving responsibilities with resources that enable greater productivity at times when questions about commitment and competence are likely strongest (e.g., around birth or adoption of a child) may combat or shield faculty from these negative stereotypes. This may include modified duties policies and availability of additional research funding concurrent with or following significant life events. Importantly, university efforts should not just entail providing resources; instead, mitigating resource depletion is key. Research shows that faculty who have fewer resources to draw upon or who experience greater resource depletion are less able to fulfill their intentions of

making time for research (Dahm, Glomb, Manchester, & Leroy, 2015). Inattention to caregiving resources faculty rely on, unbridled requests for service, and failing to consider bias in student evaluations of teaching will all contribute to resource depletion and impair research efforts of faculty, and the effect is likely to be worse for those with caregiving responsibilities. While differences between faculty with and without family responsibilities are more likely to be perceived than real, universities have the potential to amplify real differences through accelerating resource depletion.

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