

Investigating the Leaky Pipeline: Gendered Effects of Caregiving Policies on STEM Faculty

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BACKGROUND

Although women receive more doctorates across disciplines, they continue to be underrepresented at higher ranks in academia. This phenomenon is known as the 'leaky pipeline,' and is often observed in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields, although it exists across disciplines.

Caregiving policies (i.e., parental leave, tenure clock extensions) are widely adopted by universities to support faculty caregivers, with a focus on retaining female faculty. However, universities still struggle with retention issues, suggesting that current policies may fall short in addressing this issue.

This challenge could be linked to the unequal expectations and responsibilities placed on men and women. Thus, we will integrate feminist economics and the Work-Home Resources (W-HR) Model to explore the gendered effect of caregiving policies on STEM faculty.

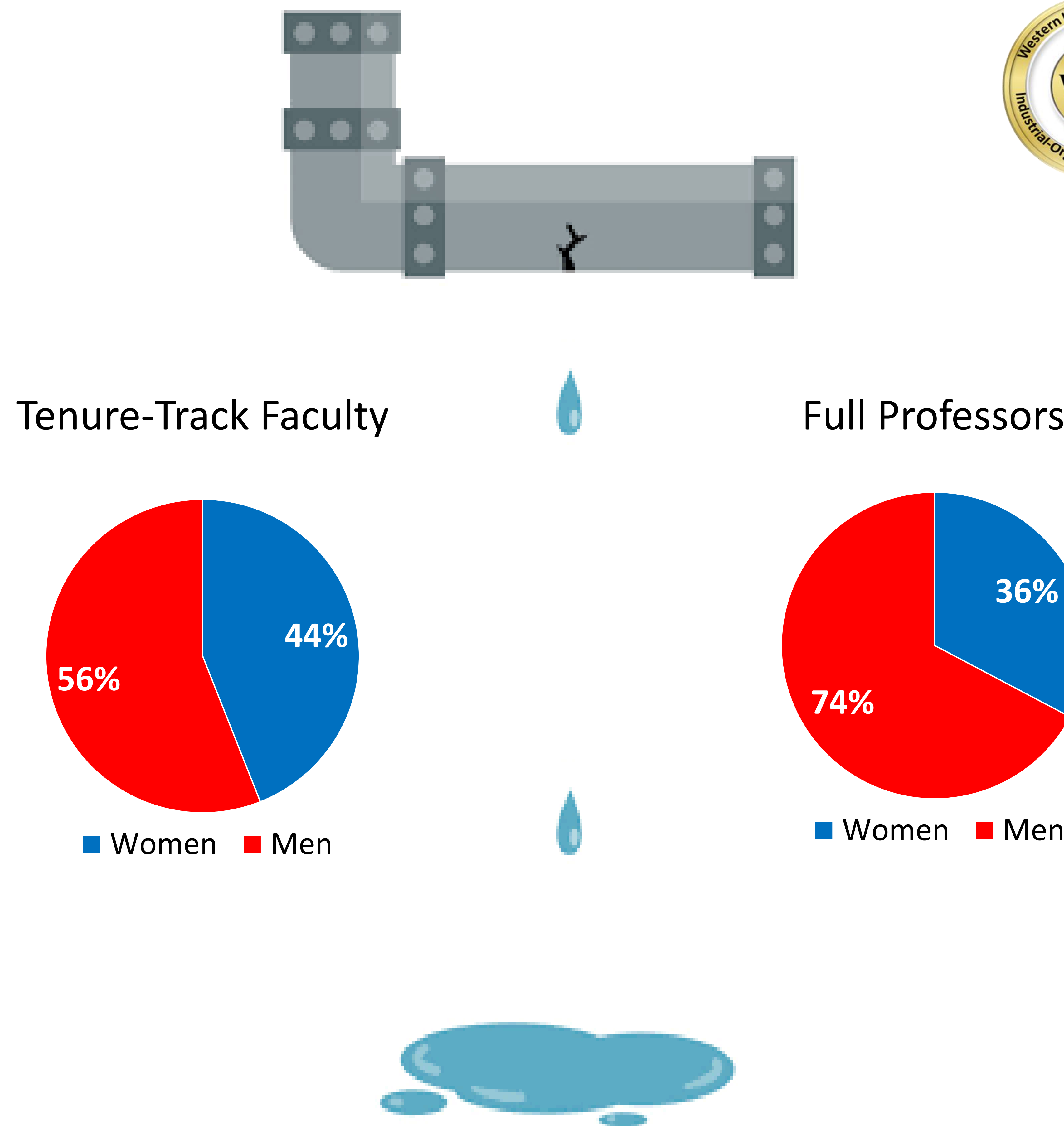
The W-HR model suggests that responsibilities in one domain (i.e., home) can spill over into another (i.e., work), with feminist economics serving as a lens to examine these dynamics, emphasizing the undervaluation of care work, which disproportionately affects women.

Notably, there is a lack of research investigating the impact of caregiving policies on female faculty members within regional comprehensive universities, where performance expectations encompass teaching, scholarship, and service commitments. Our study seeks to address this gap, hypothesizing the following:

H1: *Women faculty in STEM from Assistant to Associate Professor ranks will decrease following caregiving policy adoption/implementation.*

H2a: *Women faculty in STEM will report significantly more caregiving time compared to their male counterparts.*

H2b: *Women faculty in STEM will report significantly worse work- and well-being outcomes associated with caregiving compared to their male counterparts.*



PROPOSED METHOD

This study will analyze parental leave and tenure extension policies using publicly available data, structured interviews, and subjective assessments. Initially, 100 participants will complete an online survey, providing information on demographics, caregiving policies, workload, work-family conflict, work-family guilt, and well-being.

Following the survey, participants will be invited to a 60-minute qualitative interview conducted over Zoom. These interviews will delve deeper into their experiences with parental leave policies, return-to-work, and experiences related to pregnancy, birth, and adoption at their respective universities.

Additionally, data on caregiving policies at regional comprehensive universities will be collected from university websites and institutional research offices. This data will include the year of policy implementation and the number of male and female STEM faculty at all ranks for five years before and after policy implementation.

EXPECTED RESULTS

This study carries significant implications for understanding the potential impact of caregiving policies on STEM faculty, with a specific focus on regional comprehensive universities. The anticipated results and the broader significance of this research encompass several key dimensions.

Firstly, as we analyze the expected results, we anticipate gaining insights into the effectiveness of caregiving policies in promoting gender equity within academic ranks. By assessing promotion rates, we can gauge the policies' potential to address the 'leaky pipeline' issue, particularly for women in STEM disciplines.

The expected findings related to the time spent on caregiving and work-life balance will shed light on the gender disparities in caregiving responsibilities among faculty. This understanding has broader implications for addressing gender-based challenges faced by women faculty, especially in STEM fields.

Moreover, the examination of work- and well-being outcomes associated with caregiving policies will provide insights into the overall impact of these policies on the professional and personal lives of faculty members. The expected results can guide universities in optimizing their policies to better support the holistic well-being of their STEM faculty.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

This research will contribute to the ongoing discourse about gender equity in academia, offering empirical evidence on the potential effectiveness of caregiving policies. Regional comprehensive universities can use these insights to refine their policies and enhance the inclusivity of their academic environments.

Addressing gender disparities and caregiving responsibilities within STEM fields aligns with broader efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity in STEM disciplines. By anticipating and addressing these issues, institutions can foster a more equitable and supportive environment for faculty members.