

Female doctors spend more time than male doctors on parenting, household tasks, study finds

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A new study finds gender differences in parenting and household labor persist among a group of highly motivated physician-researchers in the early stages of their career.

The finding could shed light on why female academic physicians in general do not have the same [career success](#) as their male colleagues.

"One might expect that within a highly educated Generation X population there would be a relatively even distribution of domestic labor. But what we found was that there still seems to be a difference in the expectations at home for men and [women](#), even for those with very busy jobs, even today," says study author Reshma Jaggi, M.D., D.Phil., associate professor of radiation oncology at the University of Michigan Health System.

Researchers surveyed 1,055 people with a medical degree who had recently received [career development](#) awards from the National Institutes of Health. Questions assessed how physicians allocated their time and what their family responsibilities looked like. The study appears in the March 4 issue of *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

Among physicians who were married, the men were almost four times more likely to have a spouse who was not employed or worked only part-time. Among married physicians with children, men reported working

seven hours longer and spending 12 fewer hours on parenting and domestic tasks each week than women.

"It's possible some of these differences are explained by the ability of male [physicians](#) to still support the traditional breadwinner model of a family. The vast majority of women in our sample were married to full-time working spouses, whereas a majority of the men had part-time or non-working spouses," Jagsi says.

But even when accounting for a spouse's employment and other factors, [married women](#) with children spent 8.5 hours more on parenting and domestic activities than did their male counterparts.

"This may also reflect the impact of some very subtle unconscious expectations we all have, and these have been resistant to change," Jagsi says. For example, school forms often ask for the mother's name first, implying the woman is the primary point of contact.

What this means in the medical field in particular is that women are likely to sacrifice their research time, because that time is most flexible. If research time is sacrificed, it directly impacts the physician's success in an academic career and ultimate ability to ascend to leadership positions in the field.

The researchers cite potential interventions that could help reduce the conflict between professional and domestic roles, such as providing onsite child care at conferences, allowing the use of discretionary funding to support a nanny during conference travel, or providing subsidies for cleaning, cooking or other household tasks that could be delegated to allow time for both family and a demanding career.

"Medicine needs to be a profession in which both men and women can succeed and an environment in which women can be successful role

models," Jagsi says. "We are seeing a growing appreciation of the need to facilitate work-life balance for both [men and women](#), but it is important to recognize how this continues to challenge women more than men in our society."

More information: *Annals of Internal Medicine*, Vol. 160, No. 5, March 4, 2014

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