

Women report skipping scientific conferences because of child care

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Reshma Jagsi, M.D., D.Phil. Credit: University of Michigan Rogel Cancer Center

For oncologists in the beginning of their career, scientific conferences present an opportunity to network, share their research, gain new

knowledge and begin to advance in their career. But many women find themselves skipping these conferences because of family obligations, a new study finds.

Researchers surveyed 248 early [career](#) oncologists practicing at National Cancer Institute-designated cancer centers. Women were less likely than men to attend scientific meetings, although both genders noted that conferences were important to career advancement. Nearly half of [women](#) said having children interfered with attending meetings, while only a third of men did.

"Amid concerns about gender inequity in advancement in medicine, it is especially important to identify innovative and visible actions that target the mechanisms fueling inequity," says study author Reshma Jagsi, M.D., D.Phil., Newman Family Professor and deputy chair of radiation oncology at Michigan Medicine and director of the Center for Bioethics and Social Sciences in Medicine at the University of Michigan.

About three-quarters of both the men and the women surveyed had young children. But while 74% of women had a spouse employed full-time, only 45% of men did. And women reported spending about 10 hours more each week than men on parenting and domestic tasks. The study is published in *JAMA Oncology*.

"Our society continues to embrace a gendered division of domestic labor, whereby women bear the greater burden of responsibilities at home, even when they're highly committed to their careers. Facilitating work-life integration is essential, and this study provides concrete data to support this need," Jagsi says.

The authors cite onsite child care and women's networking venues as essential elements to improve access for women. Nearly three times as many women as men said having child care onsite at meetings would be

extremely important and would help enable them to attend.

The annual American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting in June offered professional onsite child care for children 6 months to 12 years. Jagsi says this example shows that onsite child care is feasible.

"Women want to attend these meetings. They offer critical opportunities for leadership, networking, education, mentorship, scholarly dissemination and so much more," she says. "For our profession to access the full talent pool and reap the demonstrated benefits of diversity, we need to figure out ways to promote work-life integration."

More information: Miriam A. Knoll et al, Association of Gender and Parenthood With Conference Attendance Among Early Career Oncologists, *JAMA Oncology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1001/jamaoncol.2019.1864](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamaoncol.2019.1864)

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