



How to support women in combining family and an academic career?

Mari Pihlatie (1)

(1) University of Helsinki, Environmental Soil Science, Department of Agricultural Sciences, Helsinki, Finland (mari.pihlatie@helsinki.fi), (2) Institute for Atmospheric and Earth System Research / Forest Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland

Irrespective of gender, a scientific career requires devotion and passion. At a certain age many women still choose not to perceive an academic career. Under the increasing pressure of publishing it may seem impossible to combine an academic career with family. This is the moment when the scientific community should find solutions how to better support and encourage women to continue in science. As a woman scientist and a mother of three, I feel that one important step is to show examples of how this has worked out, and how career breaks actually have affected ones career development.

I have been lucky to be part of a scientific community where family values are supported and encouraged. I have always thought and believed that scientists can have a normal life and children if they wish. Combining an academic career and family with children has not been easy. Compared to fellow scientists without children, my publication rate, networking, and active participation in international project and meetings dramatically decreased due to career breaks. This naturally led to missed academic positions, grants, and positions of trust in scientific communities. Nevertheless, I have been relatively successful in receiving external funding (3 million euros, 2014-2018), and I was recently appointed a permanent position as an Associate professor.

I can list few crucial aspects that have made my career possible and kept in within science. At first, I have had an amazing working community and supervisors who have supported and trusted me in all aspects of life. I am a goal and solution oriented person, and I work for the goal like an athlete towards the Olympics. I have spent a lot of time in thinking priorities at work and in life. Setting these priorities has helped to accept imperfection and to let go with work tasks that are not critical, and delegate those that can be delegated, also at home. One aspects that I value very high is personal wellbeing. For me this means regular time for sports. In fact, I believe it has been the most important source of inspiration, and a way to keep me sane within science and at home. To conclude, I strongly support and recommend to be brave and follow your goals and priorities in science.