



Navigating parenthood as an early career scientist: insights and challenges from hydrological sciences

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Combining an academic career with caretaking responsibilities is an often-overlooked challenge. Juggling the workload, conference attendance, or the potential requirement to move to a new job all become more demanding when children or other caretaking responsibilities are a part of your life. We, members of the Young Hydrology Society (YHS), wanted to hear some views from academic parents in hydrology. What are the challenges they face, what is their advice to other parents and what systematic changes would they like to see? This non-scientific initiative gathered responses from academics within the hydrology community from different parts of the world at different career stages, including PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, assistant professors, and group leaders. The survey revealed diverse challenges and strategies employed by academic parents to balance their professional and personal lives. We identified a complex interplay of personal, institutional, and cultural factors that influence these experiences in academia. A common theme across responses was the strategic timing of parenthood, often aligned with phases of planning security, such as after having won a longer-term grant. Despite the varying international backgrounds, many responses highlighted the supportive role of national policies, particularly in countries like Sweden, which offer substantial parental support and flexible work arrangements. However, challenges such as reduced research productivity, lack of support to attend conferences, and the need to relocate were frequently mentioned as limiting factors for career development and progression. Among the strategies employed to minimise these challenges, we highlight adjusting work schedules, reducing workloads, and relying on support from partners and extended family. Childcare distribution varied, with many striving for an equitable split between partners, though this was often influenced by career demands and cultural standards or expectations. The responses also contained suggestions for systemic improvement, including extended childcare facilities at conferences, more flexible job contracts, and institutional support for parents, particularly during fieldwork and conferences. While there are notable advancements in some areas, there remains a significant need for systemic changes to better support academic parents and ensure a more inclusive and equitable academic environment. It is fundamental to highlight, however, that the results of this initiative do not capture the entire spectrum of experiences faced by those with caretaking responsibilities, and

that our survey is likely to be biased towards ECS who still were engaged and successful in their work. We aim to release these results as a series of blog posts on the YHS webpage (<https://younghs.com/blog/>) to disseminate this topic with the main aim of offering valuable reassurance to current and future parents in academia facing similar challenges.