

## The impact of parenthood on residency

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With women comprising one-half of medical school graduates, two recent studies examined the experience that residents have when they decide to become parents during training. Find out how common parenthood is and how it impacts men versus women.



### Deciding when to have children

Two recent investigations into parenthood during training found that residents are concerned about how having a child will impact their training and how their skills and work ethic will be perceived. But the studies showed women who become pregnant are more often impacted than men who become fathers during residency.

With residents spending the prime of their reproductive years in training and more women going into medicine, a study in the *International Journal of Radiation Oncology* looked at how parenthood impacted radiation oncology residents and a second study published in the *Journal of the American College of Surgeons* explored general surgery residents' experiences.

Among the 190 radiation oncology trainees who responded to a survey, slightly more than one-half had children. Nearly 45 percent said they or their partner had a pregnancy during residency, while 50.5 percent of respondents said they delayed or were delaying having children because of residency demands.

And parental leave is a common occurrence among general surgery residents. In the study published in the *Journal of the American College of Surgeons*, 41 percent of the 66 general surgery residency program directors who responded to a survey said at least once a year they have a resident who takes maternity or paternity leave.



## Parenthood during residency



### Deciding when to have children



Had children



Delayed having children

### Workload and training concerns



$1/3$  believed colleagues would have extra work

$1/2$  believed they had less research experience



### Parenting demands

## Workload and training concerns

Radiation oncology residents expressed concerns about how a pregnancy would impact their training. One-third of those who were pregnant during residency believed colleagues would have extra work because of their pregnancy. Nearly one-half believed they had less research experience compared to colleagues, and more than one-fifth believed they gained less clinical experience than colleagues who didn't become pregnant during training.

General surgery residents who had become pregnant expressed concerns about “being a burden on colleagues,” “being perceived as ‘lazy’ or not carrying my weight,” and “being treated differently than my peers,” the study found.

Similarly, men who became fathers said they felt guilty about leaving their teams shorthanded while on paternity leave and said “the good residents take as little time as possible.”

The radiation oncology study showed no significant differences in academic productivity or academic career aspirations between men and women overall. It also found that over the total duration of training, radiation oncology residents who were mothers kept pace academically with male colleagues without children.

“That could be due to more efficient use of time and resources,” study authors said. “Alternatively, perhaps hours spent on childcare do not come at the expense of academic pursuits but instead come at the expense of self-care and leisure activities.”

General surgery program directors perceptions back that up. They saw children as decreasing female trainees' well-being more often than male trainees—32 percent versus 9 percent.

## More challenging for women than men

Women were more often responsible for childcare duties than men. Among radiation oncology residents, 38.1 percent of fathers had non-employed partners to take care of a child. No mothers had a non-employed partner. Also:

- Fathers reported performing a median 25 percent of cumulative familial childcare duties; they said their partner performed a median of 70 percent.
- Mothers reported a median of 40 percent of childcare duties, compared to a median partner rate of 35 percent.

- Nearly 75 percent of men said their partner “usually” was the caretaker when unexpected childcare needs arose; just 31 percent of women responded that way.

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