

Factsheet Nr. 2/2013

Why do young researchers leave ETH Zurich

Results from the Equal! Exit Survey 2011/2012

Questions

- Why do young researchers leave ETH Zurich?
- Where do they go to?
- Which image of ETH Zurich do they take with them?

Technical Data and background information

Survey period 01.2011 - 10.2012, n = 475 (thereof 29% women), return rate: 22%
The focus of the survey lies on Ph.D. students and postdocs

(1) Reasons for leaving the ETH

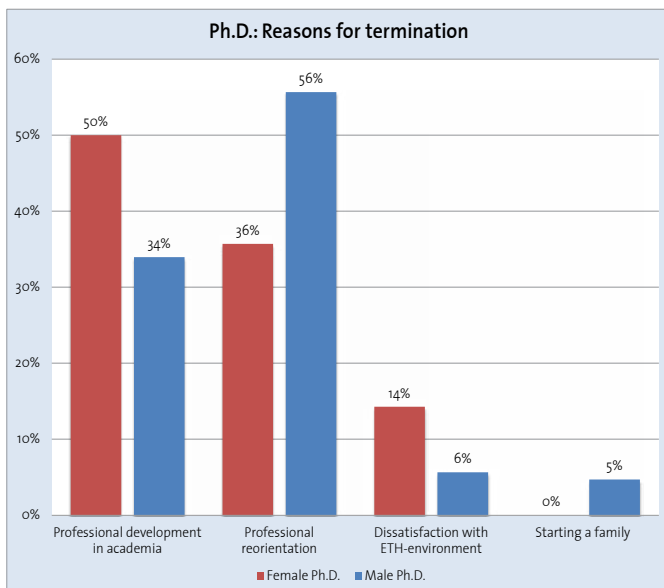


Figure 1: After finishing their Ph.D. women are more likely than men to pursue an academic career at another university. Men more often opt for a career outside of the academic environment. Terminating the academic career to start a family seems to be of less importance at this level of qualification.

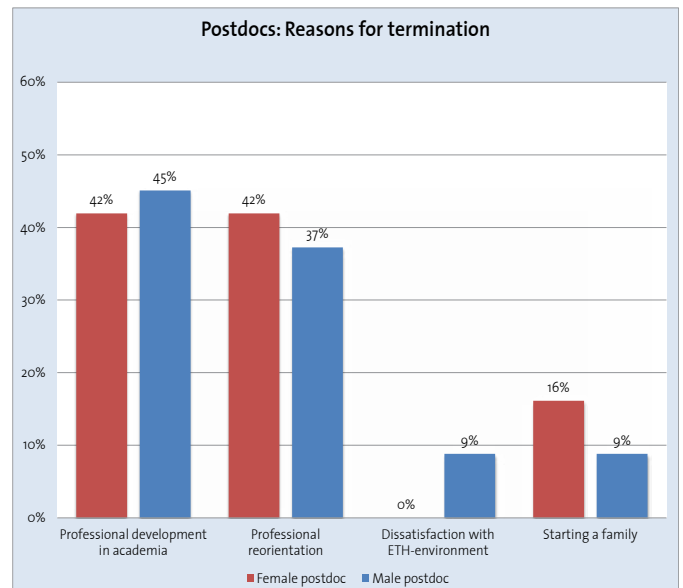


Figure 2: After a postdoc, slightly less women than men pursue an academic career. But compared to the situation after the completion of their Ph.D., much more men pursue an academic career than women. At this level the decision to leave academia in order to start a family affects both, women and men. Women are more affected than men.

(2) Researchers continuing their academic career somewhere else

- After finishing their Ph.D. women are more likely than men to pursue an academic career at another university (50% against 34%)
- After a postdoc, less women and more men pursue an academic career as compared to the Ph.D. level (42% against 45%)
- Having finished a Ph.D., men assess their prospects of an academic career more sceptical than women
- Swiss women having completed their Ph.D. and being interested in an academic career, leave Switzerland more often than men (60 % to 40%); they mainly go to the USA
- After a postdoc, Non-Swiss women tend to stay longer in Switzerland than Non-Swiss men (33% against 5%)
- Interpretation/Hypotheses
- Women do not publish their research results if they do not firmly stand behind them; thus they are more likely to give up the academic career as compared to men
- Female postdoc have a weaker feeling than men of belonging to the scientific world (Nature, Volume: 495, Pages: 22–24, 7 March 2013)

(3) Professional reorientation of researchers

- If not intending to continue an academic career (‘professional reorientation’), men are more likely to change to industry than women; this difference is especially important after having finished the Ph.D.
- Women are more likely to hold positions in science administration, education or in general administration
- Women abandoning the academic career are looking for a new challenge (53% of the female Ph.D. students and 33% of the female postdocs said this was the reason for leaving ETH); female postdocs are deterred from the uncertainty of academic career (33%)
- Many men abandon their academic career because they perceive poor chances in the academic career (35% of male Ph.D. students and 40% of the male postdocs); looking for a new professional challenge is less dominant for men than for women (33% of male students who completed their Ph.D. and 20% of male postdocs)
- 20% of the postdocs (female and male) would have stayed longer at ETH if more teaching would have been possible

(4) Image of ETH

- The excellent research-infrastructure, the expertise of the supervising professors and the worldwide network are highly appreciated equally by both women and men
- These leadership skills of supervisors are essential:
 - If young researchers perceive high leadership skills, they are pleased and are more interested in an academic career
 - Female postdocs emphasize good leadership skills and a positive group dynamic more than male postdocs (n=187)
 - 45% of the male students, who completed their Ph.D. and 77% of the male postdocs reporting negative experiences, referred to missing leadership skills of their supervisors; only 30% of the women said so (n=115)
- Being dependent on the supervisor due to extremely short-term employment contracts and the abuse of power is criticized

Possible recommendations for action

- > Cohort-monitoring: What happens to women leaving the ETH in order to pursue their academic career elsewhere?
- > Reduce (slightly) the uncertainties of the academic career path (eg. Career development programs; return-guarantees)
- > Interdisciplinary network for Ph.D. students
- > Keeping more women at ETH after their postdoc (with own research groups)
- > Improve professors' leadership skills and their knowledge about 'Gender Biases'