

Financial Aid for Female Graduate Students, Researchers and Foreign Residents in Mexico, Over 35 Years Old

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CONACYT in México has implemented in recent years three types of scholarships and different specific supports for women who wish to complete their professional training, based on the National Development Plan “Equal Opportunities”. These are in first place, *Support for mothers* who are heads of household (Bachelor and technical formation of a third level) such as single, divorced, widowed or separated Mexican mothers. In second place, it is the program complementing an education, specialization, masters or PhD—through *Scholarship grants for academic strengthening of indigenous women in CONACYT enrolled in graduate studies in Mexico or abroad* and the third place the *Young Talents Program*. Those modalities have met their specific objectives (we will focus on the first type); however, the realities pertaining to the academic, scientific, work and life cycle of women in the XXI century go beyond marital statuses, motherhood, or any particular social statuses or being indigenous and this study motives the analysis of this matter in the country.

Keywords: female students, researchers, foreign students

Introduction

Throughout history, specifically towards the end of the XIX century, as women began fully incurring into academic, professional and scientific fields (Arauz, 2015), we observe an interruption in these life plans, due to various reasons (mainly, the fulfilment of domestic obligations and the responsibilities implied by maternity and the upbringing of children), interruptions befallen either willingly or unwillingly.

Having to “interrupt” said aspirations goes beyond any individual project or vocational development; it implies, for the XX and XXI centuries, a serious regression in regards to gender equality, salary conditions, and stagnation in the scientific, technical and creative fields ((del) Val Valdivieso & Martínez, 2015, p. 7) of every country, being that if half of a country’s population is lagging in such areas it is too much to expect an evolution in the sciences and humanities, much less glimpse a promising future.

As it is well know it was women throughout Europe and Latin America who, since the 1980’s, began openly debating this dilemma throughout academies, universities, public and private institutions, associations, conferences, symposiums, national and international newsletters, etc. (Rodriguez-Sala, 2005; Blázquez, 2005). They organized various movements, feminist and non-feminist, contributing in a revindicative role that helped

impulse female participation in science.

In the case of Mexico we have the interesting surge and development of the *Independent groups in the field of gender science* (Pérez Armendariz, 2010, p. 44) who by uniting different objectives, projects from various female researchers, collective works and the will of academics and students from various universities were able, towards the end of the 1990's, to promote the effective presence of women in science lending more dynamism to main scientific institutions, including hispanic and Latin American networks and interesting editions of specialized publications (Borderías, 2006; Buquet et al., 2013).

Without a doubt, the insistent demand for the inclusion of gender perspective in the subject at hand, the recommendations on political and gender sciences in relation to the *Science, technology and innovation law* in addition to the growing rate of contributions to institutions such as CONACYT¹ and the National system of researchers (SNI)² by female Mexican researchers and scientists allow us to speak of a relative advancement made thought out the 45 years since its creation. We consider it relevant because the segregation, at a disciplinary and academic level, that has pushed women into limiting their career options due to their gender, reducing their percentage of access to Phd level education and keeping them from reaching higher hierarchy positions are aspects that reflect in a quantitative way when evaluating their positions before the, aforementioned, National system of researchers.

Up until February 2015 there were 2,655 men and 1,920 female candidates: Level I: 7,961 men, 4,814 women; level II: 2,777 men, 1,187 women; level III 1,578 men, 425 women; emeritus 195 men, 34 women (1), constituting the humanities and scientific areas. It should be noted that even though quantity and quality do not always go hand in hand, when evaluating the work done by relevant groups at humanistic and scientific research levels, it is, without a doubt, relevant to keep recognizing that in the XXI century the obstacles, disadvantages and possible discrimination of the female sector, has serious implications for the scientific reality and credibility of the totality of our environment (Levi-Montalcini, 2011).

We are aware that the subject presented here is only part of the scientific gap between developed and underdeveloped countries of the region, of the necessary increase in budgets that should be allocated to the humanities and sciences in a short, medium and long term, of the partial improvement in the recommendations *Gender equity in the National science and technology policy* (2) and of the demands made by female researchers for more than five years (Pérez Armendariz, 2010, p. 54), we join from the social sciences and humanities academic sector with new proposals than can, on one side, help to rethink, in face of the support, the concepts of "Single mother head of family" and "Female head of family" and on the other to reconsider the positioning of a considerable amount of researchers within productive age who are apparently being left behind within the "CONACYT scholarship regulations" and current calls when they opt for economic support regarding gender perspective and/or equal opportunities.

Proposals for Implementation Into the Support for Mexican Mothers Head of Family to Strengthen Their Professional Development: Future of High Level Researchers

The objectives of this support since its first call are to contribute to the professional training of single, divorced, widowed or separated Mexican mothers who are pursuing professional studies in higher level technical, scientific and technological institutions obtaining 100% of the academic credits, through allocation

¹ By its initial in Spanish, Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (National Science and Technology counsel).

² Sistema nacional de investigadores.

agreements between the proposing institution and the CONACYT.

Among the main requirements mentioned, we highlight: being head of a family (showing the quality of income provider), having “at least” one child younger than 18 years old on the date in which the call is published and that the applicant’s partner does not live in the same address. Take note: **“Children in gestation do not count”** The underlines are ours but the bold can be found in the *Applicant Guidelines, 2016* (3).

In this way, the 2013 call assigned 585 scholarships to be used from 1 up to 36 months, in a total of 103 universities, technological universities and institutes around the country. The evaluated, approved and published applications would not be susceptible to modifications, with the exception of the applicant’s refusal in which case the institution reserves the right to grant said support to other candidates that could not be favored due to “lack of budgetary disposition” as long as they held sufficient merit and a 7.8 grade point average.

The same solution - reallocation of the resources - applied when the agreement was not signed by all interested parties within the terms established in the call (4). It is emphasized that if the academic program to be fulfilled by the applicant could not be taught or completed according to the original proposal, the scholarship will be canceled. Identical guidelines were maintained for the following calls, assigning 784 scholarships to women in 2014 and 963 in 2015.

At the time of closing for this article there is no final result for 2016, but at the moment the acceptance of the call, the due budget increments for the aforementioned periods and the effective scholarship reassignment according to the established cases are clear. Dolores Manjarrez Álvarez, Liaison Director, points out that they receive over three thousand applications a year “There are important studies that show the uprise of women halting their studies or having lower performance, this is due to them having trouble subsisting with their babies. This program is a strategy to level the development conditions of men and women” (p. 5).

Why, for what and under what guidelines do we suggest *Proposals for implementation* to the aforementioned support? In attention mainly to:

1. The status of single, separated, divorced or widowed Mexican mother with “at least one child” is privileged, establishing thus the effective fact of motherhood in addition to demanding “not having a partner that lives in the same home” in order to be entitled to this type of scholarship, this, without a doubt, addresses in a practical way the realities lived in the XXI century, but it also, involuntarily, excludes other statuses of the same relevancy: that of Mexican women without children but who are head of house anyway, responsible for younger siblings, mothers, fathers or elderly family members who economically depend on the potential recipient. As it is known, in Mexico, one in four households is headed by a woman adding up to eight million female heads of family (Srinivasan & Rodríguez, 2016).

They meet the *Applicant requirements* (numeral 1) as heads of household, namely: ***Highest authority member in the making of decisions and income provider, that implies the upkeep, education and attention to basic needs of the family group***, and with proven residence in some federal entity of the country (highlighted in bold and italics within the 2016 call).

2. As already mentioned, one of the applicant requirements (numeral 3), states: “Children in gestation do not count”, which in a clear and plain interpretation declares that applying for this scholarship while pregnant, unless they already have another child, is not a viable option, neither is getting pregnant mainly to enjoy a CONACYT scholarship in the near future.

Regardless of the suspicions that these decisions, in regards to maternity, can suppose for both parties (the institution making the scholarship call and future mothers), let us get those, who are a part of the institutions of superior education, who established the principle of these calls, to reevaluate a way to apply and combine gender equality, National science and technology policy and the exercise of motherhood, because in the 21st century we cannot afford to backtrack in the legal, political and cultural scenarios by institutionalizing the non-compatibility of the binomial academic and scientific formation / pregnancy (Palomar, 2009).

3. Given that the subject that concerns us emphasizes the consequences that originate from the marital status held by women - being single, divorced, separated or widowed - in regards to the *Strengthening of their Professional Development* it is necessary to address, not only the conditions of women with or without children but also, those who after having fulfilled a determined life cycle (reproduction, upbringing and fulfillment of familial obligations relevant to the Call), move on to a new level of maturity or symbolic redefinition - the members of her family group occupy a different role (Palomar, 2009; Nash, 2010, p. 23; Estrada, 2016) - which allows her to dedicate more time to academic production and investigative labor, by this we mean, the right to enjoy institutional economic support, granted precisely, in order to strengthen a professional or scientific training towards avoiding general lagging in determined areas.

In this way we are no longer referring to the experience of maternity in young researchers or young university students with a truncated education but of the support that should be granted to female heads of family in their current status as future high level researchers, whether it be to continue their postgraduate studies or to guarantee their permanence in the investigative fields so they may continue generating significant contributions to the countries humanities and sciences (Levi-Montalcini, 2010).

4. This order of ideas should work towards finding a true continuity in the face of the *renewed efforts to increase scientific and technological capacity and training with a gender focus in quality and quantity* (2016 Call, paragraph 1), in other words it should be thinking towards the future, visibilizing young women as possible high level academics or researchers, for this we propose implementing the applicants requirements for support to strengthen professional development so that it may befall on women Head of Family (Highest authority members in the making of decision and income provider that involves up keeping, education and attention to the basic needs of a family group) with or without children of her own, regardless of her marital status with a proven residence in some entity of the country.

The requirement 2 (Not having a partner live in the same home) should be ignored, since the presence or physical absence of a partner in the same home does not imply any direct economic responsibility when the woman is considered the head of house, therefore income provider and solely responsible of her family group. We consider that this point constitutes a correct and quite realistic interpretation of current relations between genders. That is to say those in the XXI century and regardless of social status, women can occupy the role of provider of the home and not exclusively the men, as it has been in the past. The provided data for the Mexican study clearly reflects this.

For this reason, institutionally considering the requirement of a mature age for said endeavor - 35 or older, independent to marital status, with or without children, exclusive disposition for academia and without other contractual obligation in public or private sectors -, would place women in a true position of equal opportunities and competitiveness before their male colleagues, considering that those who have suffered a situation of historical marginalization, having been denied the access to knowledge and scientific work fields (Schibinger,

2004; Buquet, 2011, p. 217; Estrada & Izquierdo, 2011; Estrada & Zarate, 2017) have been women, more so than men.

We insist: we part from the act of supporting young women who heads of house with their professional are training so that they may, in a common thread with the achieved results, continue onto postgraduate studies. To consider this stage of high feminine productivity in both the sciences and humanities, from the indicated age, reflected in the use of the economic support will constitute an authentic benefit for gender equity in Mexico's science and technology policy, particularly for those who have already obtained a technical specialization or degree but due to acquired experience can no longer take advantage of the Youth Talent Programs and/or are having difficulties entering the workforce.

Finally, and comparing this call to those of high level researchers in the SNI, the role of foreign groups and their impact on all Latin American countries for the advancement of science should not be forgotten (Pérez, 2005, pp. 175-216). Just as the female foreign collective has helped consolidate gender studies in Mexico since the 1980s and continues helping to strengthen these issues in relation to the sciences and humanities, we consider that the financial aid offered by these institutions should keep as a requirement being of Mexican nationality, a naturalized Mexican or having a legal residency within the country. Any other paths lead to exclusion and discrimination, as well as a failure to promote excellence due to not addressing diversity adequately; equality of opportunity and gender equity should not abandon this points in particular.

Conclusions

Promoting female scientific and academic participation is no easy task, not even in developed countries that in the XXI century have shown to have fairly successful policies regarding gender inclusion. The reasons for this are many but the most latent is that cultural constructions take decades to be established.

Notwithstanding this, in the Mexico of 2016, we witness a gradual institutional awareness in regards to these problems, as well as a growing interest to include gender equity in CTI policies, but as emphasized in these proposals the Calls for benefits and scholarships can and should be improved in order to cover, in a more open manner, the professional training needs of young and not so young women, attending to the realities and mentalities of the new century.

Although it is true that economic support directed towards students who are single mothers serves a significant part of a vulnerable sector of the population, so does having young women who are childless but have other economic and familial obligations in their capacity as heads of house, benefit from the same resources and continue their education as high level researchers, scientists and academics. The figure of a female head of family with or without children is absolutely relevant in order to rethink the burden of traditional maternal values (Nash, 2010, p. 45), like the stereotypes that still consider men as the main providers, limiting women as simple collaborators with secondary incomes.

We are aware of the difficult times, in regards to budget cuts that we are facing but even so we, women and men, must not stop our respective work in trying to reach the desired results. "Everyday life and scientific life are permanently crossed (Palomar, 2009)". Lastly and beyond the agreements reached on world conferences, institutional recommendations or official compromises that guarantee non exclusion or discrimination we must all participate - Mexicans and foreigners - in dynamic and creative ways towards scientific development. To keep giving feedback, opening doors and exchanging experiences in scientific excellence centers is a relevant task, not only related to budget resources but also to human and cultural ones.

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