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RESEARCH ARTICLE

When Did They Manage It All? Women Doctors of Sciences on Work-Life Balance in Research and Everyday Life

Natalia S. Grigorieva [1], Natalia S. Zelenskaya [1], Nadyezhda V. Makogonova [1]

1 *Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, 119991, Russia*

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Abstract

Women scientists represent an important resource for the development of the intellectual potential of modern science. In Russia, there are 6.700 women researchers holding a Doctor of Sciences degree, accounting for only 5.1% of the total number of Doctor of Sciences degree holders. This makes increasing the representation of women among highly qualified scientific personnel a particularly relevant issue. At the same time, due to prevailing gender stereotypes and social expectations, women are more likely than men to combine professional responsibilities with family and household responsibilities in their everyday lives.

This study focuses on a distinctive group of women – Doctor of Sciences degree holders at Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU) who obtained their degrees before the age of 39 and are raising two or more children. The aim of the study is to identify the conditions and strategies that enable women to achieve high levels of scientific accomplishment while maintaining a balance between professional and family responsibilities.

The empirical basis of the study consists of five unstructured interviews with women representing different faculties. The methodological framework is based on a prosopographical approach, which makes it possible to identify common features of academic trajectories and life strategies.

The findings show that young women who achieve significant success in science can also achieve substantial accomplishments in other areas of life, despite the obstacles they face.

The study highlights the need for two interrelated measures. First, specialised monitoring of the life strategies of young women researchers should be established. Second, state family-support programmes should be supplemented with measures designed to encourage young scientists to pursue high levels of scientific achievement while also supporting them in fulfilling their roles as parents.

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Keywords

academic career; Doctors of Sciences; women in science; motherhood; Moscow State University; work–family balance

JEL codes: J16, J13, J22, I23, I28, Z13

Introduction

The problem of women's representation at the highest levels of academic careers in Russia and globally, despite the steady growth in their representation at earlier career stages, is increasingly understood not so much in terms of the "glass ceiling" as through the lens of the persistent asymmetry in the distribution of family and professional responsibilities. While the institutional barriers that have historically contributed to this asymmetry have begun to lose their rigidity in recent decades, persistent inequalities in the distribution of household and childcare responsibilities continue to pose a serious challenge. This is particularly the case when the period of the most intensive accumulation of scientific knowledge and attainment of key academic qualifications coincides with a stage of life when family and household responsibilities increase, thereby objectively reducing the time available for professional activities.

The concept of work–life balance has become an important interdisciplinary approach in social policy and practice in many countries, as reflected in the extensive Russian and international literature devoted to the harmonisation of professional and family spheres. The development of this concept is closely linked to gender studies, which are comprehensively represented in both collective and individual works. Among the collective publications, particular mention should be made of the national reviews (Gender in Russia: A Review of Literature 2004; and Gender Issues in Russia: Based on National Publications 2012), as well as the monograph Gender Panorama of Modern Russia, published to mark the 30th anniversary of gender studies in Russia (Gendernaya panorama sovremennoj Rossii 2022). Individual studies on this issue are also numerous and cover a wide range of aspects. In the fields of science, research, and higher education, the issue has acquired a distinct specificity and has been addressed in a number of studies in recent years (Rozhdestvenskaya 2019; Tarakanovskaya 2022; Rebrei 2025). These studies have made a significant contribution to defining the parameters of work–life balance and shaping the contemporary discourse on this issue in the academic environment.

Historically, science, institutionalised from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onward as a predominantly male sphere, reproduced a social norm in which caring for children and the home was regarded as a woman's natural role, while the isolated cases of outstanding female scientists, such as S.V. Kovalevskaya and A. Lovelace, only served to confirm the general rule. In modern universities, where women already constitute a significant proportion of academic staff, the question remains open as to the mechanisms underlying the sharp decline in their representation at the doctoral and professorial levels. Thus, according to Rosstat, women account for about 60% of academic staff and 44% of Candidates of Sciences in Russia, but at the Doctor of Sciences level their share falls to 29% (Women and Men in Russia 2024).

In particular, the described horizontal (disciplinary) and vertical (status) segregation is rooted in the long and contradictory history of women's access to higher education and scientific activity in Russia. Even in the early stages of the development of Russian universi-

ties, examples can be found of both the formal admission of women and their actual exclusion from scientific activity, creating a sociocultural environment whose consequences are still felt today. Against this background, it seems important to at least briefly reconstruct the key milestones of this trajectory – from the first decrees and educational initiatives to the formation of the image of the female scientist in Russian society.

Historical Context: Shaping Women's Access to Science in Russia

Stage 1. The Beginning of Institutionalisation (mid-to-late 18th century)

In 1757, at the request of Count I.I. Shuvalov, the Senate issued a decree allowing women to attend lectures at Moscow University (Baum 2022a). In 1764, Catherine II founded the Smolny Institute for Noble Maidens, the first state educational institution for women in Russia. However, these measures did not provide systematic access to higher education.

Stage 2. Individual Exceptions and Salon Culture (late 18th century – first half of the 19th century)

Against the backdrop of institutional exclusion, women were able to achieve recognition in science only in exceptional cases. A well-known example is Princess E.R. Dashkova, director of the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences and president of the Russian Academy (1783–1796) (Dashkova E.R. and the Age of Enlightenment 2005), who initiated the publication of the first explanatory dictionary of the Russian language and effectively laid the foundations for Lomonosov studies.

Between 1810 and 1850, an extensive network of literary and scientific salons emerged. Among the most significant were, in St Petersburg, the salons of Princess E.I. Golitsyna, E.A. Karamzina and S.N. Karamzina, and E.M. Khitrovo; and, in Moscow, the salon of Princess Z.A. Volkonskaya. These gatherings served a compensatory function, providing support to scientists, writers, and philosophers, but did not eliminate institutional inequality (Baum 2022b).

Stage 3. Institutionalisation of Women's Higher Education (second half of the 19th – early 20th century)

In 1872, the Higher Women's Courses (MVZhK) opened in Moscow – the first higher education institution for women in Russia, where courses were taught by professors from Moscow University. For young women, this was practically the only opportunity to receive a fundamental classical education (Valkova 2019). The courses were closed in 1888 but resumed in 1900. However, they received the right to conduct final examinations and award diplomas only in the 1915/16 academic year.

At the same time, women's commercial schools were established. The activities of the Moscow Society for the Dissemination of Commercial Education (MORKO), which opened a women's commercial school following the establishment of a men's school, are particularly indicative (Grigorieva 2026). These institutions created the necessary conditions for the emergence of a critical mass of educated women, but little more: full rights to receive diplomas and academic degrees remained inaccessible.

Stage 4. Legislative Consolidation of Formal Equality (1911–1918)

The Law "On the Testing of Females in Knowledge of the Course of Higher Educational Institutions and on the Procedure for Acquiring Academic Degrees..." of 19 December 1911 allowed women to receive state diplomas of higher education and academic degrees, thereby opening access to professional scientific careers. The Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR of 2 August 1918 finally secured the right of any person, regardless of gender, to enrol in any university. By 1925, Moscow University already had 5.040 female

students, compared with 5.005 male students (Valkova 2019). However, in the early 1950s, there were only 22 female professors at Moscow State University (Pushkareva, Zhidchenko 2025).

Stage 5. The Gap between Formal and Real Equality (mid-20th century)

Despite the removal of formal barriers, the actual representation of women at the highest levels of the academic hierarchy remained low. Data from the early 1950s for the USSR Academy of Sciences show that, among 5.700 women scientists, there were 2 academicians, 11 corresponding members, 141 Doctors of Sciences, and 2.127 Candidates of Sciences (Pushkareva, Zhidchenko 2025; Women – Doctors of Sciences 1957). This gap indicates that institutional changes do not automatically overcome deep-rooted asymmetries in the distribution of family and professional responsibilities.

Thus, the historical background presented above illustrates that, at each stage, formal opportunities expanded, while deep inequalities remained – their forms simply changed.

From Historical Context to Numbers: Women Doctors of Sciences at Moscow State University (Statistical Profile and University Environment)

According to data provided by the Department of Personnel and HR Policy of Moscow State University (as of 8 and 10 April 2026), the university has 1.698 men and 714 women holding a Doctor of Sciences degree (70.4% and 29.6%, respectively), working across 112 structural divisions, including faculties, research institutes, museums, centres, and branches (Department of Personnel and HR Policy of Moscow State University, personal communication, March and April 2026).

Among all Moscow State University departments, the highest proportion of female Doctors of Sciences is found at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies: 21 out of 25 (84.0%). The Faculty of Journalism ranks second, with 25 women out of 37 (67.6%). The Faculty of Philology ranks third, with 64 women out of 96 (66.7%); the absolute number of Doctors of Sciences in this faculty is also significantly higher than in the first two faculties.

Data on the 10 humanities and 10 natural science departments at Moscow State University with the highest proportions of female Doctors of Sciences are presented in Table 1.

Gender analysis shows that women are least represented among Doctor of Sciences degree holders in the natural sciences, mathematics, and engineering units, including the Faculties of Physics, Mechanics and Mathematics, and Chemistry, the Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, and other relevant units. Their representation is particularly low in the Faculties of Physics and Mechanics and Mathematics, where women account for only 8–15% of Doctor of Sciences degree holders.

At the same time, considerable variation can be observed within this group: in the biological and medical fields, the proportion of women is substantially higher, at approximately 35–37%. In the humanities and social sciences, including the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies, the Faculty of Journalism, the Faculty of Philology, the Faculty of Psychology, and other relevant units, women holding Doctor of Sciences degrees are significantly better represented. The top five positions in the ranking by the proportion of women are occupied by humanities and social science units, where women account for at least 50% of Doctor of Sciences degree holders.

At the same time, in absolute numbers, the largest numbers of Doctor of Sciences degree holders are found in the natural science faculties, particularly the Faculties of Biology, Chemistry, Medicine, and Physics.

Table 1. General distribution of Doctors of Science by gender and department at Lomonosov Moscow State University

	Subdivision	Men	Women	Total	Proportion of women
	Natural Science Units (Top 10)				
1	Faculty of Soil Science	26	20	46	43.5%
2	Faculty of Biology	134	79	213	37.1%
3	Medical Research and Educational Center (Lomonosov University Clinic)	70	37	107	34.6%
4	Belozersky Research Institute of Physico-Chemical Biology	36	16	52	30.8%
5	Faculty of Geography	48	21	69	30.4%
6	Faculty of Chemistry	169	69	238	29.0%
7	Faculty of Geology	62	18	80	22.5%
8	Institute of Mechanics of Moscow State University	22	6	28	21.4%
9	Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics Lomonosov Moscow State University	53	12	65	18.5%
10	Faculty of Physics	196	35	231	15.2%
	Humanities Units (Top 10)				
1	Department of International Affairs	4	21	25	84.0%
2	Faculty of Journalism	12	25	37	67.6%
3	Faculty of Philology	32	64	96	66.7%
4	Institute of Asian and African Studies	15	16	31	51.6%
5	Faculty of Psychology	22	22	44	50.0%
6	Faculty of Public Administration	24	19	43	44.2%
7	Faculty of Global Studies	15	10	25	40.0%
8	Faculty of Economics	54	33	87	37.9%
9	Faculty of Law	48	28	76	36.8%
10	Faculty of History	37	18	55	32.7%

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the Department of Personnel and HR Policy (MSU), as of 8 April 2026 and 10 April 2026.

In absolute numbers, the largest numbers of Doctor of Sciences degree holders are found in the natural science faculties, particularly biology, chemistry, medicine, and physics.

In the information space of Moscow University, a number of initiatives can be identified that aim to highlight the contributions of women researchers. In particular, the website of the Faculty of Physics of Moscow State University contains materials about women scientists in the field of physical and mathematical sciences in the first half of the 20th century (Ermolaeva 2022), while the Kazakhstan Branch of Moscow State University publishes the educational newspaper Filiada (Kazakhstan Branch of Lomonosov Moscow State University 2025), individual issues of which are dedicated to women scientists.

Alongside these disparate, albeit significant, initiatives, the Regional Public Organisation "Council of Women of Moscow State University" (RPO "Council of Women of Moscow State University") demonstrates a fundamentally different level of institutionalisation of targeted efforts to preserve the memory of women scientists and provide them with comprehensive support. To mark the 250th anniversary of Moscow University, the first biographical

dictionary devoted to women associated with the university was compiled and published in 2004 under the title Moscow University in Female Faces (Moskovskii universitet v zhenskikh litsakh 2004). It included information about 619 outstanding women scientists and teachers and effectively became a unique information base for subsequent research, as well as an important tool for addressing their "invisibility" (Makogonova 2026).

Another important area of the Council's activity has been its traditional informal meetings of female university employees with the Rector of Moscow State University, Academician V.A. Sadovnichy, held to coincide with International Women's Day. Founded in 1987, the Moscow State University Women's Council launched this format almost immediately. Over time, it developed into an effective tool for supporting professional growth and, in essence, began to function as a "career elevator" (Zelenskaya 2026).

Thus, the 2026 meeting brought together MSU students, postgraduate students, and academic and research staff, including recipients of state awards and awards conferred by the President of the Russian Federation, laureates of the Presidential Prize, the M.V. Lomonosov Prize and the I.I. Shuvalov Prize, recipients of scholarships from the President and Government of the Russian Federation and MSU scholarships, young scholars holding a Doctor of Sciences degree, as well as participants in volunteer initiatives, student construction teams and research teams. The meeting once again highlighted the breadth and diversity of women's contributions to university life.

Alongside the discussion of professional achievements, a personal dimension also emerged: the young scholars who spoke at the reception – Associate Professor E.Vl. Bulinskaya, Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, and Professor V.V. Vedyushkina, Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences – successfully combine active research careers with raising two or more children. The authors' observations during the meeting prompted the present study, which focuses on the prospects for women under the age of 39 to pursue a scientific career while balancing professional and family responsibilities.

Research method and methodology

The methodological basis of this study is the prosopographical approach (the method of collective biography), which has become widespread since the 1970s and is aimed at identifying patterns in the relationships and activities of social groups through the systematic analysis of the biographical data of their members (Stone 1971; Yumasheva 2022). This approach developed in line with trends in historical scholarship that, in contrast to impersonal macro-historical schemes, emphasised the importance of cultural context, individual agency, and everyday practices. The theoretical development of prosopography has opened up opportunities for interdisciplinary research within the academic community, including the study of the biographical trajectories and everyday lives of women scientists.

In particular, this method has been used to analyse the successful professional trajectories of women scientists who worked in Soviet science cities in the 1950s and 1960s (Pushkareva, Zhidchenko 2025; Pushkareva, Zhidchenko 2023), drawing on the biographies of physicist E.N. Kladnitskaya (Dubna), mathematician L. V. Keldysh (Zhukovsky), and P.Ya. Kochina (Novosibirsk Akademgorodok), the first woman to be elected an Academician of the USSR Academy of Sciences in the Division of Mathematical Sciences (1958).

In the context of our research, the biography of Lyudmila Vsevolodovna Keldysh is of particular interest. She defended her doctoral dissertation at the age of 36 (1940), gave birth to three sons by the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, and had two more daughters after

the war. As a mother of five children, she made a significant contribution to science but remained in the shadow of her younger brother, M.V. Keldysh, President of the USSR Academy of Sciences from 1961 to 1975, and her husband, Academician P.S. Novikov, the founder of the school of mathematical logic in the USSR (Belova 2013; Pushkareva 2021; Zaporozhchenko 2022; A Female Mathematician with a Surname Known to Every Resident of the USSR 2022).

The empirical basis of the study consisted of five unstructured interviews with women scientists who successfully combine professional activities with family responsibilities. The empirical material was collected in April 2026, and all interviews were recorded with the respondents' consent.

Four participants had defended their doctoral dissertations before the age of 39: one at the age of 29 and three between the ages of 35 and 38. The fifth participant received her doctoral degree at the age of 44; an exception was made in her case because she was raising five children.

The age threshold used in the study was determined in accordance with Federal Law No. 489-FZ of 30 December 2020, "On Youth Policy in the Russian Federation" (Federal Law 2020), which defines young people as citizens aged 14 to 35 inclusive. In the field of science, official sources and statistics typically use the age of 39 as the upper limit for "scientific youth," allowing researchers who are actively involved in scientific projects and developments to be included. The choice of this age threshold is determined by the practical tasks of analysing the demographic situation in science, planning personnel policy, and assessing its effectiveness. This criterion was therefore used as a guideline in the present study.

At the same time, according to available data, the average age of Candidates of Sciences in Russia is 52 years, while that of Doctors of Sciences is 62 years (Nikiforov 2026). The question of the extent to which this age structure is a natural consequence of the increasing complexity of science itself, and the extent to which it results from institutional barriers that can and should be overcome, remains an important issue.

The interviews were based on four questions, which were further developed depending on the respondents' answers:

1. Is there a problem of combining professional and family roles in the life of a female researcher, or is it merely perceived?
2. Did you encounter any difficulties while preparing your doctoral dissertation, and if so, what kind?
3. Do marital and family relationships affect the effectiveness of scientific work? More specifically, do marriage and motherhood affect the scientific careers of young female researchers?
4. How do you see your prospects in science and family life? What are your plans for the near and more distant future?

Research results

The interviews were conducted at various locations within Moscow State University and lasted between 50 minutes and 1 hour and 9 minutes.

Biographical Profiles of the Interview Participants

Elena Kimovna Beloglazkina graduated with honours from the Faculty of Chemistry of Moscow State University in 1989. In 1992, she defended her dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Chemical Sciences, and in 2006, at the age of 38, her doctoral dissertation

for the degree of Doctor of Chemical Sciences. The title of her doctoral dissertation is "Oxohalides of Phosphorus and Sulfur – Activating Coreactants in Electrophilic Addition Reactions". She is currently Professor in the Department of Organic Chemistry, Faculty of Chemistry, Moscow State University, and Head of the Laboratory of Biologically Active Organic Compounds (BAOC), Faculty of Chemistry, Moscow State University. She was awarded the I.I. Shuvalov Prize in 2006. She raised three children.

Ekaterina Vladimirovna Bulinskaya graduated with honours from the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics of Moscow State University in 2009. In 2012, she defended her dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, and in 2024, at the age of 37, her doctoral dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences. The title of her doctoral dissertation is "Bellman–Harris Branching Processes and Their Applications to Branching Random Walks". She is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Mathematical Statistics and Random Processes, Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics, Moscow State University. Her Candidate of Physical and Mathematical Sciences dissertation was recognised by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Russian Federation as an outstanding study. In 2022, she won the First All-Russian Competition for Young Mathematicians in the category "Young Scientist under 35". She is a laureate of the I.I. Shuvalov Prize (2024). She is raising three children.

Victoria Viktorovna Vedyushkina graduated with honours from the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics of Moscow State University in 2012. She defended her dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Physical and Mathematical Sciences in 2016 and her doctoral dissertation in 2020, receiving the degree of Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences at the age of 29. The title of her doctoral dissertation is "Integrable Billiards on Cellular Complexes and Integrable Hamiltonian Systems". She is currently Professor in the Department of Differential Geometry and Applications, Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics, Moscow State University. She was awarded the Russian Academy of Sciences Medal with a prize for young scientists (2021) and the Moscow Government Prize for Young Scientists (2019). She is a laureate of the I.I. Shuvalov Prize (2024) and the Presidential Prize of the Russian Federation in the field of science and innovation for young scientists (2025). She is raising two children.

Olga Vladimirovna Mikhailova graduated with honours from the Faculty of Public Administration of Moscow State University in 2001. In 2005, she defended her dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Political Sciences, and in 2015, at the age of 35, her doctoral dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Political Sciences. The title of her doctoral dissertation is "Network Architecture of Public Administration: Problems of Conceptualisation and Practice". She is currently Professor in the Department of Political Analysis, Faculty of Public Administration, Moscow State University. She is raising two children.

Olga Andreevna Rubtsova graduated with honours from the Moscow Engineering Physics Institute (MEPhI) in 2000. She defended her dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Physical and Mathematical Sciences in 2004 and her doctoral dissertation in 2021, receiving the degree of Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences at the age of 44. The title of her doctoral dissertation is "The Method of Packet Discretisation of the Continuum for Few-Particle Systems and Nuclear Matter". She is currently Senior Researcher in the Laboratory of Atomic Nuclear Theory, Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, Moscow State University. She is a co-author of a new approach to solving few-body scattering problems based on the discretisation of the continuous spectrum. She is raising five children.

A first-order analysis of the interviews revealed a number of significant similarities in the biographies and professional trajectories of the respondents. All participants completed

their studies with distinction, demonstrating a high level of academic preparation and motivation. Their scientific careers began during their studies, indicating the early formation of research interests. Most of the participants met their spouses literally in the classroom and built their lives with partners from the academic environment, which created a synergistic effect in their professional development. For almost all of them, their immediate family played a significant role in their professional socialisation: for some, scientific dynasties were present in their parents' families, while for others, they were present in their spouses' families. In any case, the example and support of relatives involved in science influenced the formation of their scientific strategies and worldview. All participants have achieved outstanding scientific results and are engaged in work they find fulfilling.

The first question – Is there a problem of combining professional and family roles in the life of a female researcher, or is it merely perceived? – revealed a virtually unanimous recognition of the reality of such a problem. Most participants described it as significant and requiring constant effort, citing time constraints, household responsibilities, and the need to manage complex family logistics. At the same time, a dissenting opinion was also expressed: one respondent noted that, compared with the business sector, scientific work provides women with more favourable conditions for combining professional and family responsibilities.

"...A very real problem. I'm always running around: driving someone somewhere, doing household chores... And if the children are sick, everything falls on me, basically. My completed tasks, seminars, and tests – I do them honestly and conscientiously, quite well, but still…" (B.E.Vl.).

"It's probably difficult to combine. But I myself did not experience these difficulties; when I defended my dissertation, I didn't have children yet... I gave birth to my daughter nine months after the deadline for submitting documents to the Moscow State University Council. Now she is four and a half years old, and my son was born later; he is one and a half years old." (V.V.V.).

"...It's not very simple... but everything depends very much on the family. If people help in the family, then all issues are resolved. If a person is alone, then this is a big problem. Support is absolutely necessary – even just sitting with the child for a couple of hours." (R.O.A.).

"There is a problem of combining, and it is serious. But, thanks to the family cooperative, I was practically never on maternity leave... At our family council, we decided that everyone would take on a day: one day for me, one day for my husband, one day for one grandmother, one day for the other grandmother (the grandparents are Candidates and Doctors of Sciences, professors, and they already had similar experience). This scheme worked, and we repeated it with each child... As a result, I returned from maternity leave earlier and earlier – after the birth of my second child, I went back to work after four months, and after the third, after two. Plus, of course, there was the support of the department's leadership: they immediately offered me a convenient, flexible work schedule. I gave birth to my first child quite early, when I had a lot of strength; in youth, you're not afraid of anything. But it was still hard – I put the children to bed, slept for an hour myself, then got up and worked at night, or got up between five and seven in the morning." (B.E.K.).

At the same time, another opinion was expressed:

"It's not difficult. I had an idea of scientific work as more relaxed, leaving more time for personal matters and involving less conflict, but, admittedly, being less well paid. The choice was mine. Today, my opinion has not changed. I compare my ability to combine work and family with the lives of my friends who work in business, and I am convinced that I have more favourable conditions. Besides, I am doing something that interests me, and this creates an additional important positive effect for the family." (M.O.V.).

In response to the second question – Did you encounter any difficulties while preparing your doctoral dissertation, and if so, what kind? – the majority of participants noted that they had not experienced any specific scientific obstacles. The main difficulties lay elsewhere: they included organisational and procedural barriers, lack of time, and the everyday workload.

"I didn't encounter any difficulties because I was interested in developing a topic that was new to Russian political science at the time. But I didn't even think about a doctoral dissertation; it seemed to me that it was an unattainable height and that 'women are not accepted as Doctors of Sciences'. Although there are many positive examples in our faculty. Then the excitement came. Of course, there was the nervousness necessary for such procedures, but none of this can be called a difficulty. Difficulties can arise if no one supports your desire to obtain a degree, but everyone supported and helped me." (M.O.V.).

"From a scientific point of view... there weren't any particular problems, but there were family and organisational ones... I worked in the mornings while the children were sleeping, or at night. The main thing is to force yourself to make time amid the daily grind. I had 26 articles forming the basis of my dissertation, and 39 publications in total. It's difficult to organise yourself, but it's possible. And the support of colleagues and the laboratory is very important: our head of the laboratory, who has three children himself, has always treated us well." (R.O.A.).

"There were no difficulties of a strictly scientific nature. On the topic of my doctoral dissertation, I published 15 articles without co-authors in leading journals, the results of which were presented at major conferences. But household ones – yes. I think it's a matter of... willpower and organisation. Many very capable people, although they have an idea of what the scientific result should be, are not prepared to spend the time and effort needed to bring what they have started to a successful conclusion. And when you're short of time and have small children at home who wake up at night... I put the children to bed, lay down with them to make sure they fell asleep, and got up at five in the morning while they were fast asleep. From five to seven in the morning, you can study for two hours; no one bothers you, no one distracts you... I am very grateful to my colleagues from my home faculty for their attention and kind attitude." (B.E.Vl.).

"In terms of science and writing the dissertation, there were no particular difficulties. I write quite easily (the number of articles published per year confirms this – sometimes up to twelve). Rather, there were organisational difficulties: finding time amid the daily grind. But the main thing is to force yourself to organise your time." (B.E.K.).

"...Not scientifically... I just worked for a monstrous amount of time, practically without raising my head for four years. ...Organisationally, yes. Firstly, it took a very long time to establish the dissertation council – this was an institutional barrier. Then the COVID-19 pandemic began. The presentation for my dissertation defence took place on the day that remote learning was introduced in the country. Something was constantly changing, and the defence date was postponed... I was nervous, and then I 'let go of the situation' and simply sat down to write another article. And everything worked out." (V.V.V.).

The third question – Do marital and family relationships affect the effectiveness of scientific work? More specifically, do marriage and motherhood affect the scientific careers of young female researchers? – received a unanimous, albeit nuanced, response. All participants confirmed that family has a significant influence on their work but emphasised its dual nature: when there is a favourable emotional environment and genuine support from spouses and family members, it becomes an additional resource, promoting greater concentration, organisation, and more efficient use of time. At the same time, several participants (B.E.K., V.V.V., R.O.A.) supplemented this point with an important clarification: when conflicts arise within the family, their impact on scientific productivity inevitably becomes negative.

"...First of all, in terms of motivation... My first steps were supported by my parents, who helped to raise my eldest son, including financially. My husband and I met at university, so there have been no problems arising from misunderstandings; he always helps and supports me. We do everything together; he doesn't have patriarchal attitudes (no dinner – he'll cook too; too tired to cook – we'll order :)); there's always a solution that works for everyone. Motherhood hasn't had a negative impact on my scientific work; quite the opposite. It's always nice to think that everything is going well in my scientific work, family life is going well, and my youngest son is running around and playing. Perhaps, of course, I don't fit the usual image of a mother who is constantly busy with household chores and surrounds everyone with her attention. But my children have known me like this from birth: more concerned with work matters and philosophical problems than with issues of food, cleaning, washing, and ironing..." (M.O.V.).

"Yes, they do, and significantly so. In our family, everyone loves each other and tries to support each other. This helps a lot in life. However, I think that you still have to sacrifice something, and my choice is not to sacrifice my family and children... Luckily, my work is structured in such a way that I can prepare for classes independently, choosing a convenient time. For example, I deliberately take the metro – the journey from home to Moscow State University takes about an hour – because it allows me to concentrate... I try not to sacrifice sleep so as not to undermine my immunity. You have to sacrifice your hobbies (going to the theatre, classical music concerts, art exhibitions) and free time. Of course, my husband and I don't completely give up interesting events and try to involve the whole family." (B.E.Vl.).

"They do have an influence, and a significant one... but in the sense that they help rather than hinder. With the arrival of children, a woman becomes more collected and organised. Motherhood makes a woman more fulfilled; it disciplines her. Children are not a burden but a source of inspiration. Conflicts, if there are any, interfere. Women who achieve high results in science are those who have support, primarily from their families and their teams. Single women are the exception. I would say that the influence is significant, but rather positive..." (R.O.A.).

"If there are conflicts in the family, they interfere. And if there is support and understanding, it helps significantly. My family certainly helped. Firstly, through psychological support. Secondly, motherhood makes a woman more organised and collected. When you combine several activities in parallel, it requires strict time management. And you become wiser, or something..." (B.E.K.).

"They have a significant impact, but they help rather than hinder. My husband supports me – he looks after the children while I work. We run the household together and raise the children together... We don't have a strict division between male and female responsibilities. I can't say that I would be more effective without my family. On the contrary, when everything is calm at home, you understand that everything is fine, and you can do something extra. This is very important for a woman. Motherhood requires discipline and time management." (V.V.V.).

The fourth question – How do you see your prospects in science and family life? What are your plans for the near and more distant future? – yielded both overlapping and unexpected answers. Almost all respondents, regardless of their specialisation, spoke of a desire to continue their research and teaching without aspiring to formal positions of status. At the same time, each shared deeply personal plans that are rarely associated with the image of a "classical scholar": to revive balls at Moscow University, to return to painting, to seriously consider having a fourth child, to visit Kamchatka and the Kuril Islands, or... to have grandchildren.

"In science, I do not set myself the goal of becoming a Corresponding Member or an Academician. It is important for me to continue my research, develop my approach, and pass on knowl-

edge to students so that the scientific school can continue. I am also interested in teaching; I am not interested in doing administration alone. In life, I want to travel... I dream of visiting Kamchatka, the Kuril Islands, Baikal, and Altai. And also to take up painting again (a childhood hobby). But the main thing is to wait for grandchildren and enjoy this new status. In general, you can't do science all the time without changing your activities. You need to switch." (R.O.A.).

"It may sound pompous, but my plan is not to be content with what I have achieved or to be lulled into complacency by a doctorate and a professorship. These achievements need to be constantly confirmed; in this respect, being a Candidate of Sciences is easier, as there are fewer expectations... Reaching this position was easier; everything was clearer." (M.O.V.).

"I wouldn't want to be a boss, a person whose job description requires me to 'make speeches'. I'm more interested in research and in continuing to try my hand at applied work. And in life, I don't want to postpone expanding my family. My, my... Even my mother was surprised; she thought three was quite enough. But for me it is a natural need. I look at little children being held in their arms, and I myself so want to hold a little one in my arms. Motherhood is wonderful. And for older children, the arrival of little ones is very useful: they see how much work and care a small child requires... they realise this." (B.E.Vl.).

"I don't necessarily aim to become a Corresponding Member or an Academician. It requires a huge amount of effort, and the rewards are disproportionate... I think in terms of projects. There is an interesting project now, which I hope will yield results. As long as I have the strength, I would like to continue working. In life, my family and I love to travel. I used to be involved in mountain tourism; we went to the Caucasus and the Pamir-Altai. I dream of visiting Kamchatka, the Kuril Islands, and Altai. I'm also interested in gardening – I grow tomato seedlings, cucumbers, and aubergines (although no one eats them). I also love drawing – I did it as a child, but now I don't have time, although I'd like to get back to it. You can't do science without changing your activities: sport, drawing, gardening – all this helps you to recharge. And, of course, grandchildren – the eldest already has a small child, and I'm looking forward to the opportunity to experience this new role." (B.E.K.).

"I want to unwind a little over the next few years... The children are small; the eldest goes to nursery and is constantly ill: the adjustment period is difficult. The nursery is right next to our house – three minutes away – and the school is also visible from the window. This is the ideal option. In science, I do not necessarily aim to become a Corresponding Member or an Academician. Perhaps we should continue working within the framework of Academician A. T. Fomenko's school, develop some new and interesting directions within this framework, and find connections with other areas of science. The priority is to continue research and pass knowledge on to students. Other than that, I really want to get back to dancing. As a student, I actively studied at the Moscow State University School of Ancient Dance (founded by VMC teacher Viktor Lapshin and then-chemistry graduate Daria Vasilkova), and attended the Golden Forests studio (where classes are also taught by MSU graduates). I took an active part in organising dance classes for Moscow State University balls. If we could revive balls at the university, it would be great!" (V.V.V.).

Additional observations

Beyond the direct responses to the questionnaire, several underlying themes emerged.

Firstly, all participants spoke with warmth and gratitude about the role of their supervisors and colleagues in their professional development. Although a doctoral dissertation is, by definition, an independent study and does not require an official academic supervisor,

the genuine support of mentors (Academician A.T. Fomenko, Professor N.V. Zyk, and heads of departments) and creative collaboration with colleagues were perceived as important factors in their success.

Secondly, during the first interview, a discussion spontaneously arose about the possibility of defending a doctoral degree on the basis of a body of published work. Opinions were divided: some emphasised the value of the dissertation text as a means of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the research findings, while others drew attention to cases in which distinguished scientists postponed defending their dissertations for years because they lacked the time to prepare a lengthy manuscript. It is noteworthy that this possibility is provided for by Government Resolution No. 426 of 2021 (Government Resolution 2021), but in university practice it has not yet become a genuine alternative.

Thirdly, the responses revealed a wide range of extra-professional interests that the respondents themselves regarded as a necessary resource for switching off and recovering: tourism, historical dancing, painting, live-action role-playing games, gardening, and fitness. It is significant that many of these activities are rooted in university culture (the Moscow State University School of Ancient Dance, student travel clubs, and university balls).

Finally, the interviews revealed a particular attitude towards formal academic status positions: participants spoke proudly of their achievements and awards, but made virtually no effort to obtain the academic titles of Corresponding Member or Academician, preferring to focus on meaningful research and the transfer of knowledge to students.

Despite individual differences in family circumstances and career trajectories, common features clearly predominate in the participants' biographies. A deep passion for science and the perception of research as a vocation form the foundation of their professional identity and success. Family is an equally significant value for all respondents. They speak with equal pride about their defended dissertations, students, awards, families, and children. In some cases, their children are already continuing a scientific family tradition in related or other fields, while in others, they are just taking their first steps, and questions concerning the choice of nursery or school remain relevant.

It is this synthesis of professional dedication and family involvement, which permeates the interviews as a whole, that allows us to speak of a stable pattern rather than a series of fortunate exceptions. Almost every participant, reflecting on her path, emphasised that science and motherhood do not compete but, on the contrary, mutually enrich each other: children provide composure and inspiration ("Motherhood makes a woman fulfilled; it disciplines her", respondent R.O.A.; "...You become wiser", respondent B.E.K.), while meaningful and fulfilling professional work, in turn, creates a positive emotional environment for the whole family.

Thus, the life narratives of our interviewees reveal not merely the possibility but the organic compatibility of high levels of scientific achievement with a fulfilling family life, with the professional and family spheres mutually enriching one another.

Discussion

Over the course of several decades, there have been repeated attempts to present a collective portrait of Russian women scientists who have made significant contributions to science. The majority of such works have focused on biographical approaches. Among the notable recent publications is a collection dedicated to the 300th anniversary of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Women in Science of Russia 2024), which presents short biographies

of twenty outstanding female researchers, mainly academicians and corresponding members of the Russian Academy of Sciences. A smaller proportion of those included were Honoured Scientists of the Russian Federation, Doctors of Science, and honorary workers in higher professional education (Women in Science of Russia 2024). With all due respect to the individuals included in the collection, it is nevertheless worth noting that a much wider range of names, whose scientific achievements and productivity are no less significant, remained outside its scope. Moreover, none of the biographies mention family achievements or the combination of professional and family roles. This circumstance once again demonstrates the need to broaden the research perspective and turn to biographical trajectories that have so far rarely attracted the attention of historians of science.

The decision to interview female scientists who obtained their doctorates at a young age and successfully combined professional and family responsibilities was motivated, among other factors, by the findings of earlier studies conducted at Moscow State University. In particular, the projects "Family Strategies of Student Youth: Work–Family Balance" (2008; 2019) (Andryushina, Grigorieva, and Panova 2019) and "Social Factors of Childlessness in Russia" (Grigorieva, Duprat-Kushtanina 2014; Grigorieva, Duprat-Kushtanina, and Sharova 2014) identified a stable trend: even when they wish to have at least two children, students tend to postpone starting a family until they have achieved their career goals and resolved their housing issues. The growing number of students, both men and women, who do not plan to become parents is also a cause for concern (Grigorieva 2020). Against this troubling backdrop, the life trajectories of our respondents appear particularly significant: they demonstrate that high scientific productivity and a fulfilling family life are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but can be mutually supportive.

A similar picture has been documented abroad. According to the Vienna Institute of Demography, 44% of female scientists aged 40–45 had no children, while the average number of children per female scientist in this age group was 0.9. More generally, Austria and Germany are characterised by high levels of childlessness among women engaged in academic science: according to various estimates, the proportion ranges from 45% to 60%. Data for other European countries appear less pronounced: the share of childless female scientists is around 25% in Poland, around 20% in Sweden, and approximately 10% in France and Spain (Kostina 2017).

More than thirty years ago, in 1995, G. Sonnert and D. Holton published the widely acclaimed book "Who Succeeds in Science: The Gender Dimension", in which they sought to empirically test two competing hypotheses: the "glass ceiling" hypothesis, which suggests the existence of an invisible barrier preventing women from advancing to leadership positions, and the "threshold" hypothesis, according to which, after overcoming a number of initial barriers, gender ceases to influence career trajectories (Sonnert and Holton 1995). Drawing on a large dataset comprising 699 questionnaires and 200 in-depth interviews, the authors traced the dynamics of a "leaky scientific system", partly driven by gender differences. The study also draws on the personal stories of 10 women and 10 men: half of them eventually became highly successful scientists, while the others left science. These stories candidly reveal career paths, obstacles and sources of support, as well as the challenges and rewards of combining a scientific career with family life.

In Russia, relatively few studies have examined the relationship between an academic career and motherhood, which may be partly explained by respondents' reluctance to discuss deeply personal matters in an academic context. Available demographic estimates paint a rather concerning picture: according to the data cited, the likelihood of remaining childless among women with an academic degree in Russia is higher than among housewives, while the age at which they have their first child is approximately five years higher than that

of women with lower levels of education. Behind these figures there is often an implicit assumption that the low representation of women in science reflects their prioritisation of having and raising children, for the sake of which they give up a scientific career (Pronin 2008). Our small-scale study reveals a fundamentally different picture: having children – not just one, but two to five – does not prevent the participants from achieving high scientific results and may, under certain conditions, contribute to doing so. This has been achieved, of course, not without the support of parents and colleagues, but first and foremost through thoughtful self-organisation and a conscious distribution of priorities, which once again confirms the validity of the well-known principle that difficult does not mean impossible. The question, therefore, is not whether such a combination is possible in principle, but rather what mechanisms and forms of support are necessary to facilitate it and what support young female scientists can realistically expect from their families, university management, or the state.

Thus, the primary task is to identify and implement mechanisms that can provide targeted support to young women seeking full self-realisation in both science and family life. Similar instruments have existed in international practice for decades. In Austria, the Hertha Firnberg programme was launched in 1999, providing grants exclusively to young female scientists (Wald 2008). In 2006, the Elise Richter programme was launched to support more experienced female researchers; it ran until 2025 and was subsequently incorporated into the new FWF ASTRA Awards programme (FWF 2025). Several countries, including Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Germany, have specialised funds aimed not only at providing professional support to female researchers but also at covering family-related expenses, including childcare; annual funding under such programmes can reach €50.000–100.000 per applicant. In 2017, the United States passed the INSPIRE Women Act, which requires NASA to encourage the participation of girls and women in STEM disciplines and careers in the aerospace industry (HR321 2017). The L'Oréal–UNESCO For Women in Science scholarships, which support PhD candidates under the age of 35, also play a significant role (Solovei 2021). The grants offered vary in their conditions: some programmes encourage researchers to remain at their current place of work, while others, by contrast, promote various forms of academic mobility. The amount of funding is, of course, limited (for example, the annual budget of the aforementioned Swedish fund is around €10 million). However, the very existence of such instruments is of fundamental importance, since it demonstrates, on the one hand, society's recognition that a female scientist can simultaneously be a mother and a wife and, on the other, its willingness to provide her with support.

As shown above, women's path to higher education and science in Russia went through several stages, from the first decrees of the mid-18th century to the legislative consolidation of formal equality in 1911–1918. However, throughout this entire period, the deep asymmetry in the distribution of family and household responsibilities did not disappear but merely changed form, continuing to hinder women's self-realisation in science.

In Russia, there are currently no special programmes directly aimed at young female scientists with children. At the same time, a range of general measures to support families partially applies to this category of specialists, including maternity (family) capital; an annual family payment provided for by Federal Law No. 179-FL of 13 July 2024, starting in 2026 (Federal Law 2024); housing improvement programmes; and preferential mortgage schemes. Some universities are also implementing their own initiatives aimed at supporting young families, including the possibility of transferring from fee-paying to state-funded tuition for women who give birth during their studies, as well as the creation of mother-and-child rooms or short-stay childcare groups. A number of measures are also available to academic staff, but these are of a general rather than targeted nature.

An example of an integrated approach is the support system for young families presented on the NITU MISIS website (NITU MISIS 2020). Certain forms of support for young female researchers also exist at the regional level; however, information about them is not systematised, which complicates their dissemination and use. Thus, in the Kemerovo Region (Kuzbass), since 2003, the Governor of the region has awarded a prize for the defence of a Candidate or Doctor of Science dissertation (Resolution of the Government of the Kemerovo Region – Kuzbass No. 349, 2023, which establishes the current amount of the payments). Thus, a comprehensive system of targeted support for women combining scientific careers and motherhood has not yet been established.

There is a view that support for scientific projects and research should not take the gender of the researcher into account, and that scientific work itself, as an intellectual activity, is neither inherently male nor female (Pushkareva 2014). While this argument is valid within an idealised model of science, actual practice reveals a persistent asymmetry associated with the phenomenon of the "double burden": women, as a rule, bear a greater share of domestic and family responsibilities, which can lead them to postpone or even abandon their aspirations for the highest levels of an academic career. In this regard, the development of special programmes to support women in science can be viewed not as a privilege, but as a means of promoting greater equality of opportunity. This raises the following research question: what specific career paths are currently available to women in universities and research institutes, what barriers remain significant, and what additional support measures can help ensure the continuity of young female researchers' scientific careers?

The results of a study of the biographies of five young women – Doctors of Sciences in various fields – who successfully combine intensive research work with family and parental responsibilities are relevant not only to researchers and practitioners. The authors' key message is aimed primarily at those considering a scientific career. It is equally important that parents, teachers, and mentors involved in shaping the career and family strategies of young people become familiar with the biographies and conclusions presented here. The authors hope that the issues raised in the article will attract the attention of specialists in the sociology of science and gender studies, as well as decision-makers in the fields of human resources management and science policy.

The biographical examples considered here are not merely stories of personal success, but also the result of conscious choices concerning life strategies. They allow us to trace both the characteristics of the social environment in which the participants' personal and professional development took place and the specific decisions they made to realise their potential. The system of values and behavioural norms they developed enabled them to achieve a high level of professional fulfilment during the period under review, obtaining a doctoral degree by the age of 35–38. The "family or career" dilemma, often discussed in the sociological literature, did not prove insurmountable for them. All of them are successful and happy wives and mothers, with families in which their husbands share responsibility for household chores and childcare. The participants successfully combine professional and parental responsibilities, portraying themselves in their narratives as caring mothers who manage to find time both for high-level academic research and for everyday family concerns.

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Information about the authors

- Natalia Sergeevna Grigorieva – Doctor of Political Sciences, Professor, Head of the Department of Sociology of Management, and Head of the Centre for Comparative Social Policy and Gender Studies, Faculty of Public Administration, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, 119991, Russia. Email: grigorieva@spa.msu.ru
- Natalia Semenovna Zelenskaya – Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, Professor, and Chief Research Fellow at the Department of Nuclear Reactions, Scobeltzyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, Lomonosov Moscow State University; Chairperson of the Presidium of the MSU Women's Council, Moscow, 119991, Russia. Email: ns-zelenskaya@yandex.ru
- Nadyezhda Vladimirovna Makogonova – Candidate of Economic Sciences (PhD), Associate Professor at the Department of Theory and Methodology of State and Municipal Administration, Faculty of Public Administration, Lomonosov Moscow State University; Deputy Chairperson of the Presidium of the MSU Women's Council, Moscow, 119991, Russia. Email: n.makogonova@gmail.com