

# Snowmass2021 Letter of Interest : Lifestyle and Personal Wellness

Kétévi A. Assamagan<sup>1</sup>, Carla Bonifazi<sup>3</sup>, Johan S. Bonilla<sup>2</sup>, Mateus F. Carneiro<sup>1</sup>, Tiffany R. Lewis<sup>5</sup>, Sam Meehan<sup>4</sup>, Sara Simon<sup>6</sup>, and Savannah Thais<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Brookhaven National Laboratory

<sup>2</sup>University of California, Davis

<sup>3</sup>Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

<sup>4</sup>CERN

<sup>5</sup>USRA

<sup>6</sup>FNAL

<sup>7</sup>Princeton

## Thematic Areas:

- CommF1: Applications & Industry
- CommF2: Career Pipeline & Development
- CommF3: Diversity & Inclusion
- CommF4: Physics Education
- CommF5: Public Education & Outreach
- CommF6: Public Policy & Government Engagement

## Contact Information:

Samuel Meehan: [samuel.meehan@cern.ch](mailto:samuel.meehan@cern.ch)

**Abstract:** This is a group-written contribution pertaining to the interplay of personal lifestyle and professional activities including childcare and other non-professional responsibilities.

## Elements of Interest :

- What is a “work week” anyhow?
- Work life balance/respecting boundaries (i.e. weekends/vacation)
- Families - maternity/paternity leave, working with children
- Working in and respecting different timezones
- Effects of COVID-19 and what we have learned from it
- Mental health issues - What are the pathologies? How to address them?

## General Description :

Our community is immersed in a very competitive work environment that leads to a conflict of priorities in individuals. This generates considerable stress in the search for trying to find a balance between work and other personal needs, such as family, vacation, free time, etc. In particular, this is true for members of the Early Career community who commonly feel the need to stand out as competitive and successful researchers to ensure future employment and resources. The competition in particle physics is particularly stressful as often people working together in the same collaboration will end up competing for the same job positions. Very often individuals end up working after hours, during the weekends, without respecting their needs for leisure, vacation, physical activities, etc. This can cause long-term health problems due to the stress, lack of physical activity, and lack of psychological support which in turn can lead to depression, anxiety, and serious illness.

Having a collective understanding of the importance to set and respect the boundaries between work and personal life in the field of particle physics is needed to define a new framework for collaborative work. In this context, a unique gap emerges between researchers who have children or other individuals to which they have to dedicate a significant fraction of their time. Young children or dependents with special needs are examples whose care can take most of the time spent outside work. Most often the time spent taking care of other individuals is significantly higher for females than males<sup>1</sup> which only serves to increase the gender gap. This leads to an imbalance in productivity between men and women<sup>2</sup>. This causes a bias which disadvantages women who are either not able to evolve their careers in the same way as men or who, in order to compensate, end up sacrificing their quality of life. Establishing adequate maternity and paternity leaves and a culture of taking them, in order to equate these family responsibilities as well as relax the demands in these cases, must be a priority to more fully improve the quality of the work environment. This holds for senior positions as well as graduate students and postdocs. It is also of utter importance that hiring committees take this into account, balancing the time spent on family responsibilities (e.g. caring for young children) when evaluating the productivity of a researcher and the dynamic and advantageous qualities that this demonstrates in an individual. The current pandemic due to COVID-19 enhances all these situations. For example, childcare has become a more demanding activity while schools have been closed. Many studies have shown that this has drastically increased the gender gap and the gap between researchers that have caring responsibilities and those that do not. The boundaries between work and personal life have become even more subtle and the stress of not dedicating enough time to work has dramatically increased.

The following points, discussed in a previous D&I town hall meeting, may play key roles in addressing issues related to work-life balance:

*(1) Maternity and paternity leave :* Different countries and institutions handle this differently in terms of the duration of the leaves allocated to expecting parents. In the past, in some cases, becoming parents was not encouraged until one becomes tenured. With tenure drifting later and later and people taking non-traditional

---

<sup>1</sup><https://www.the-scientist.com/news-opinion/gender-gap-in-research-output-widens-during-pandemic-67665>

<sup>2</sup>We acknowledge that this language is not inclusive to all genders. It is written this way to most accurately reflect the literature with respect to gender gap. The issue with non-binary inclusivity in data will be addressed in the resulting proposals of this LOI.

career paths, waiting until tenure may be impractical or impossible in many cases. That has changed but still needs to be improved to allow parents to balance family and professional needs. We touched upon the issue of raising a family and staying competitive and visible in the professional field—the family needs may change as the children grow. Attending to the family needs while maintaining professional presence and competitiveness in a balanced way requires cultural changes beyond the support provided by institutes. Even for colleagues without children, there are personal and family needs to consider. If leave is unpaid, it can also compound disadvantages in socioeconomic background.

(2) *Importance of taking vacations* : In many cases, vacation days are not used as we feel the pressure to stay on top of professional activities and commitments. We need a culture change. We suggest that group leaders, advisors, or people in charge, encourage their group members to take time off and not work during that time. One might come back from a well-enjoyed vacation more relaxed and efficient and in better health. On a personal level, one should see if taking well-deserved days completely off would really adversely impact productivity or publication plans.

(3) *Meetings across different time zones* : In many cases, one may not find a time that works for everyone concerned. We suggest recording these meetings for the people that cannot attend; to bring up salient topics for discussions in public forums such as Slack so that people who could not attend the meeting have a chance to add their voices. We further suggest that, in meetings where time zone differences disfavor significant participation, no major decisions be taken, and an effort to be made to integrate the inputs from the larger community of the folks concerned.

(4) *Ambulance chasing* : Both in the theory and experimental communities, there are periods of high pressure to release results either for conferences or to get citations or following an impending discovery. This is colloquially referred to as “ambulance chasing”. This may be sporadic or continuous putting a lot of pressures on personal or family lives. We do need a cultural change to break this cycle of ambulance chasing. In addition, ambulance chasing often leads to results/publications that are not as carefully scrutinized or well thought-out as they should have been. We need to talk about the structures that generate these problems and address how different groups suffer under it.

(5) *Working after-hours and during weekends* : Often, after many hours of work during the workweek, there is the need or obligation to work further after-hours or during weekends. This may have a significant impact on personal or family lives. Here too we need a culture change to encourage efficient working conditions so as to reduce the need to work during weekends or after-hours. We need also to address the power dynamics that support unreasonable requests/timelines, which can uniquely affect the Early Career community.

(6) *Mental Health Resources* : HEP is a high-stress environment that often does not yield space for self-care. In this culture, adequate mental health resources should be provided and encouraged, especially for researchers who feel alienated and/or are far from their home (e.g. URM). Typically these responsibilities are put onto the employing institutes, but often HEP research is done away from the home institute preventing the researcher from utilizing those resources. It is imperative to provide plentiful on-site mental health services at national labs and options for researchers working abroad. In addition, it is important to have mental health professionals who can empathize with the intersectional nuances of URM researchers. Finally, there must also be flexible work schedules to enable individuals to use these services as mental health professionals often only work during normal 9-5 working hours.

(7) *Alignment and Transparency In Work and Performance Metrics* : If organizations wish to change the metrics they use to measure research personnel then they must also be sure that the work they are doing is aligned with those metrics and that any changes are transparent and communicated to research personnel. For example if a lab wants to increase the number of peer reviewed publications from its scientists, the lab leadership should ensure that the scientific work it is assigning is the type that will lead to a peer reviewed

publication. Otherwise researchers will have to spend time on side projects, negatively affecting work life balance.

*(8) Two Body Challenges :* Accepting a new position often requires relocating, which can be further complicated for those with partners and family. We suggest partner accommodation programs at all levels of employment as well as support structures that can help partners find a job. For the case where both people are in academia (a case that disproportionately affects women), we suggest the practice of Dual Hiring be expanded. This problem is particularly harmful to temporary visa holders or those with visas for spouses that do not permit their spouses to seek employment. It is also more harmful to those supporting children and those already disadvantaged by their socioeconomic backgrounds.

This Letter of Intent proposes to study and evaluate the current balance between work demands and the quality of personal lifestyle, aiming to identify and articulate the problems within our community. It also seeks to propose concrete solutions that minimize the imbalances found by seeking greater equity among the individuals of the community. These proposals will form part of the eventual recommendations for funding agencies and institutions surrounding parental leave and the ability to separate work and personal life.