



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

It is not just a field on a form: maternity on the Sucupira Platform

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On January 2023, the Parent in Science Movement delivered a letter (cosigned by 1587 scientists) to the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior, CAPES (Higher Education Personnel Improvement Coordination - the agency that oversees the graduate system in Brazil), requesting the inclusion of specific fields on the Sucupira Platform for maternity related information. This platform is a database to collect information on the Brazilian graduate system, which CAPES uses to evaluate graduate programs, directly impacting the program's reputation and funding. Recently, CAPES has changed its evaluation parameters (Figure 1a), but they continue to focus on quantitative metrics, primarily publications. This productivity-based system does not necessarily translate into quality, and puts pressure on graduate programs, which, as a result, pressure advisors and students to meet a rigid set of parameters to remain accredited.

The request for a specific field on the Sucupira Platform for information related to maternity/adoption means much more than just a field on a form, since it addresses one of the main drivers of gender inequality in science: the lack of support for mothers. A survey conducted in Brazil (Machado et al. 2019), showed that motherhood directly impacts women's scientific careers, often leading to drops in productivity in the years following motherhood due to a lack of support from institutions and funding agencies. Considering the academic productivist scenario, mothers end up facing various barriers, having their career progression impaired or being forced out academia (Figure 1b). In Brazil, where productivity is a key metric for CAPES evaluations, a drop in productivity can impair the entrance, permanence, and progression of mothers in the graduate system. Furthermore, several graduate programs make it difficult for students to exercise their right to maternity leave, under claims of likely negative effects on the students degree timelines, which is an important factor accounted for in CAPES evaluations.

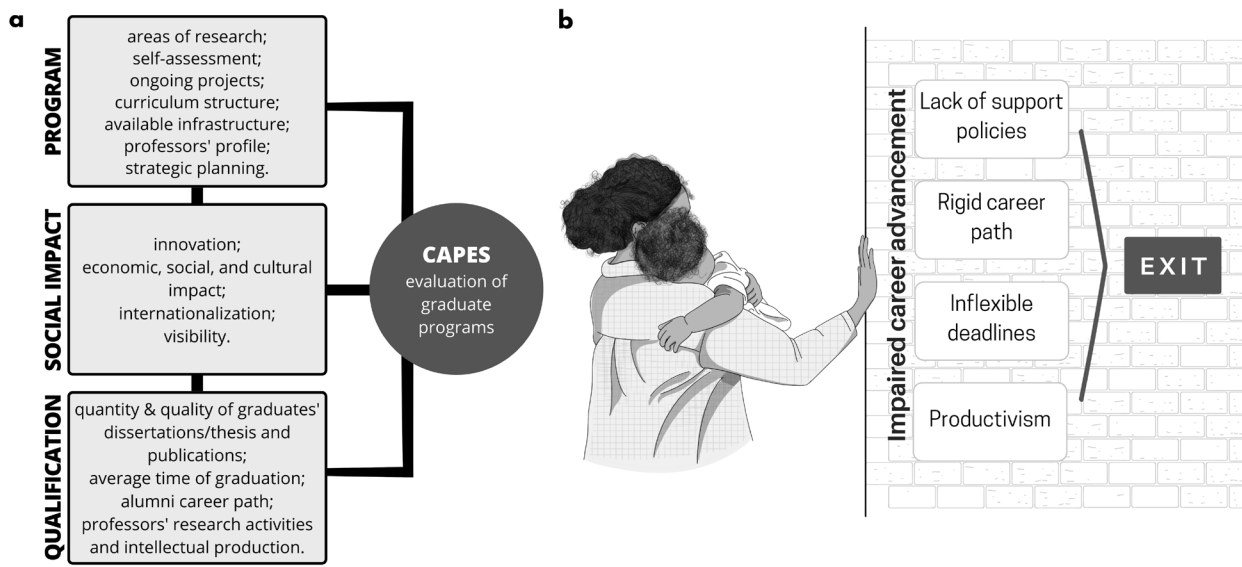


Figure 1. CAPES evaluation of graduate programs and the impact on mothers' academic careers. **a.** CAPES evaluates the National Graduate System every four years with the participation of the academic-scientific community through appointed consultants. Evaluation is performed by 49 committees, organized by areas of knowledge, focusing on three main aspects: Program, Qualification, and Social Impact. For each main aspect, committees propose definitions and indicators specific to their area. The final scores generate grades ranging from 1 to 7, with 1-2 meaning disqualification, 3-5 meaning regular to very good, and 6-7 meaning excellence at an international level. Programs with higher grades have advantages, especially concerning receiving financial resources from CAPES. **b.** Mothers in the scientific community encounter a multitude of barriers that can compromise their ability to attain success and progress in their careers. In the Brazilian National Graduate System, these barriers are perpetuated by a culture of productivity-focused norms, rigid career paths, inflexible deadlines, and a widespread lack of comprehensive support policies. Only by addressing and dismantling these barriers can a more inclusive and equitable environment be established for mothers in science, thus preventing their exit from the academic field. **Illustration: Marcela Babini.**

On March 2023 a new version of the Sucupira Platform was released, incorporating the specific fields for information related to maternity/adoption leave, as recently implemented in the Lattes Platform, as a result of the Parent in Science movement mobilization (Staniscuaski et al. 2021). This will lead to significant changes in the evaluation process of graduate programs, allowing for flexibility in the existing criteria. For example, the graduate program coordination could request a temporary removal of the scientific production's metric of professors who were on maternity/adoption leave during the four years evaluated or extend the evaluation window by 2 years for each child born/adopted during the quadrennium evaluated to offset the impact of motherhood on their productivity. Moreover, deadline extensions related to maternity/adoption leaves should be excluded from the average time for students to complete the graduate program.

Incorporating these measures into the Sucupira Platform and adapting the parameters used for CAPES evaluation process will contribute to the improvement of the Brazilian science national policy towards a more diverse and truly equitable academic system, leading to a significant and urgent transformation in the entrance, permanence, and progression of women in the academic career. The loss of talented individuals as a result of an inflexible academia has far-reaching negative

impacts that extend beyond the individuals themselves, affecting the academic landscape as a whole. Addressing this issue is a crucial step to a science of true excellence.

Acknowledgments

We are immensely grateful to everyone who expressed their support for our demand by signing the letter to Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES).

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How to cite

STANISCUASKI F ET AL. 2023. It is not just a field on a form: maternity on the Sucupira Platform. An Acad Bras Cienc 95: e20230135. DOI 10.1590/0001-3765202320230135.

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