

Quitting academia: A Gender Analysis of Academic Departures in Poland and the USA

Academia, once a bastion of intellectual pursuit and professional stability, is increasingly finding itself in a crisis. A recent trend has emerged wherein academics in various disciplines, despite seemingly fulfilling careers, are voluntarily choosing to leave their posts, thus triggering a drain in intellectual capital and diversity within institutions worldwide. The idyllic idea of faculty retiring after a quarter of a century of dedicated service, appears to be a diminishing in reality, replaced instead by faculty resignations. This project is to understand why academics decide to leave, how this process looks like and how their careers develop after the exodus.

The traditional lure of academia, with its promises of flexibility, prestige, continuous learning, collaboration with brilliant minds, and the nurturing of young talent, seems to be losing its gloss.

This is not without reason. The environment is increasingly marred by long working hours, escalating competition, and notable personal sacrifices that are often more likely to be held by women. The allure of the proverbial 'ivory tower' is gradually diminishing, partly due to decrease in funding, increasing pressure to publish (or perish), and declining wages. Recent surveys conducted by Nature and The Chronicle and Fidelity Investments show that majority of surveyed faculty members are unsatisfied with their careers and seriously consider options outside of academia. It is crucial to emphasize that these struggles inherent in academia are not evenly distributed across women and men. Although women are not a minority within the broader academic community, women continue to be positioned as the 'other' - an anomaly rather than the norm (Pingleton et al., 2016). Evidence further suggests that women are subjected to more rigorous standards and their qualifications are frequently underestimated. Thus, the reasons why and how they decide to leave may differ from men's perspective. This study is to shed more light onto this problem, doing so by analyzing life stories of academics in Poland and the US. Studies on this topic dominate the USA, however all were based on quantitative approach, missing the lived realities of academics. Poland, however, has been understudied in this regard, as so far no study would investigate this phenomena.