

OR-28

How precarity and denied academic citizenship experienced by early-career researchers endanger research integrity

Mirjam Heetkamp

Leibniz University Hannover, Germany

Universities promote themselves as democratic institutions educating young people as active, responsible and engaged citizens and preparing them for the work context. At the same time, each university itself provides a work context for their academic members, among them early career researchers.

Referring to the situation of researchers at academic institutions, the concept of ‘academic citizenship’ has been introduced. It is associated with membership, recognition and belonging to a specific academic institution, but in a broader perspective also with the service duties and responsibilities that academics have, both to their scientific communities and the society at large [1]. The working profile of a person highly influences the willingness and ability to participate in practices of democratic decision making. Economic, time-related, psychological, social, and mental aspects of the job (conditions) have a lasting effect on the ability to exercise democratic rights effectively [2]. Only a research environment which recognizes all its researchers as members and grants full academic citizenship to them, provides a solid foundation for research integrity and safe institutional culture.

But to what extent do academic institutions promote academic citizenship and provide spaces for justice, equality and inclusion for their youngest members - early career researchers? Early career researchers severely contribute to the well-functioning of universities. At the same time - as part of their academic socialization - it is commonly expected of them to be mobile and get to know various academic institutions to promote their careers. In Germany, 96% of early career researcher have a non-permanent working contract [3]. High mobility as well as non-permanent contracts foster precarious working conditions. These conditions highly affect the academic citizenship status of early career researchers, e.g. being granted less democratic rights and participation opportunities at the institutions. At the same time, being a vulnerable group, early career researchers are more severely affected by power abuse and role conflicts at their institutions.

This presentation aims at revealing the connection between denied academic citizenship of early career researchers and research integrity. Measures on how institutions can support academic citizenship of early career researchers will be presented and discussed with the audience to establish a safe research environment and full academic citizenship for all researchers.

References:

- [1] Sümer, S., O'Connor, P., Le Feuvre, N. (2020). The Contours of Gendered Academic Citizenship. In: Sümer, S. (eds) Gendered Academic Citizenship. Citizenship, Palgrave Macmillan Cham.
- [2] Honneth, A. (2023) Der arbeitende Souverän: eine normative Theorie der Arbeit. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- [3] Konsortium BuWiK (2025): Bundesbericht Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler in einer frühen Karrierephase 2025. Bielefeld, wbv Publikation, 32.