

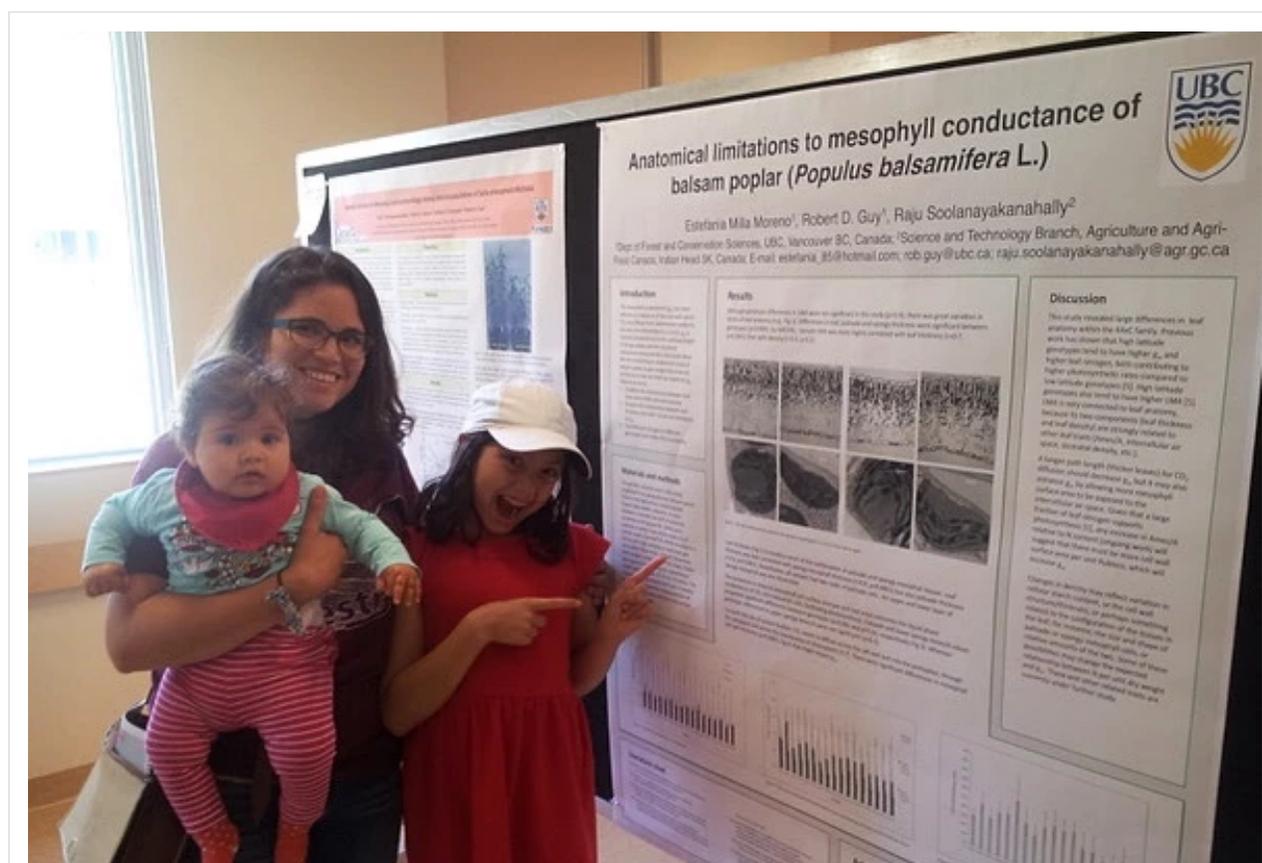
# Life story: Estefanía Milla-Moreno

Academia needs to move towards a more family-friendly environment.

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Estefanía Milla-Moreno is currently a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia (UBC) studying forestry. Her first child was born in 2005 while she was an undergraduate student in Chile. Her second child was born in 2013 in Canada during her MSc studies. She took four months maternity leave.



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Estefanía and her children at a conference.

## How has your life led you to become a scientist parent?

My husband and I are both PhD candidates in the Forestry Faculty at the University of British Columbia (UBC). We have two daughters, 13 and 4 years old, who have been truly involved in this academic endeavor. Having children has definitely affected all our lives. I had my first daughter when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Chile (Santiago, Chile) and was supported greatly by my mother. My husband and I got married shortly after I defended my thesis and became a Forest Engineer.

The second time I got pregnant was during my MSc at UBC. Having had my first child at such a young age left me rather traumatized and I was scared how it would affect my studies. But when I confided in my supervisor, he was very supportive and couldn't believe why I was so afraid of telling him that I was pregnant. We don't have family in Vancouver, so we can only rely on our good friends whenever needed.

For my PhD, I was able to collect some of the data in my home country Chile for three months, while my husband stayed in Canada to study and work and took care of the children by himself. Now that I've finished my data collection, we are planning on having the third child. My current scholarship can be extended for six months (as paid parental leave), and that would make things a little bit easier in the beginning. Plus, we like the thought of having one per degree!

I think that people often feel that they have to choose between having a family or a career in science, as you have to be 100% committed to both things. Nevertheless, I still think it's feasible. It's just a matter of realizing that things go slower. You also need to balance the parenting responsibilities well with your partner. I am both a very happy mom and researcher, but it's painful at times. I think to co-parent with your partner is crucial and also the only way to succeed.



## What support have you received as a parent from your country, institution, and friends and family?

My husband and I received a 'Becas Chile Scholarship' from our home country to do our MSc and PhD studies. Unfortunately, though, they do not really account for having children, nor do they provide funding for research. So, when you have kids you have less time to do your research because you have to compromise on your kid's activities, illnesses and other domestic matters. During my MSc I managed to receive an extension of four months, and my PhD can now also be extended for six months of maternity leave (although my husband is not entitled to paternal leave). It is tough, as we do not come from a wealthy background, and only rely on our scholarships and extra income through research, and additional work as teaching assistants and exam invigilators.

## What for you has been the most difficult aspect of balancing parenthood and science?

Time, money and energy are the most important aspects of balancing a healthy life in terms of parenting

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Some ideas to improve this situation would be to provide childcare facilities at conferences, more flexibility when it comes to deadlines and extended health insurance.

## What more could be done to improve the lives of scientist parents? And what single change would have the biggest impact on you?

I definitely think that science (research) has to move towards a more family-friendly environment. Time frames and financial support for families have to become a priority. Universities should be obliged to provide some support for families, and in particular international students with families. This would have an immense impact on both the student and their kids.

## What advice would you give to other scientist parents or scientists who are thinking of having children?

Talk to other students with kids, try to live on campus to reduce commuting times. And also, keep in mind that people expect you to perform to the same standards as someone without kids. Research can take a backseat at times but being a parent cannot.

## How do you think the challenges of being in academia (including graduate studies) and a parent compare with the challenges faced by other professionals who are also parents?

They are very different situations. Professionals get paid more than graduate students and receive parental benefits. They have, however, less flexibility and cannot skip meetings if a kid is sick or needs you at a certain time. So, there are advantages in both sites.

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### Scientist and Parent

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