

WHAT CHANGES DO YOU BELIEVE WILL HELP FUTURE GENERATIONS OF WOMEN IN SCIENCE THE MOST?

Farah Ishtiaq,
Ecologist, Indian Institute of Science,
Bangalore

Women need to develop a positive and supportive attitude towards other women. I have seen many senior women scientists who like to talk about this but are not doing enough to support struggling women scientists. There are many fellowships/schemes for women scientists, which is great, but I have seen such opportunities being exploited too, which gives a bad name and experience for other competitive candidates. Change in policies which influence women's career – for e.g. maternity break, supportive working environment and attitude towards career break.



Sarah Iqbal,
Public engagement officer, India
Alliance

We must first acknowledge and identify the challenges that women face in science and accordingly develop enabling policies to ensure that more women are able to participate. Since, the underrepresentation of women and other minorities in professional spaces, specially in leadership roles,

is not specific to science, we must take a holistic approach to solve these problems and to retain and nurture diverse scientific talent in science. No stopgap or impassioned measures but well thought-out plans to encourage more young girls to take up science and women PhD graduates and postdocs to successfully transition into science careers that interests them. Our interventions should really be aimed at increasing diversity, inclusivity and equity in the workforce. Finally, we need to create positive and healthy professional spaces that are conducive for both working women and men so that they can work cooperatively towards a common cause – of ultimately making this world a better place.

Savita Ayyar
Research Management Consultant,
Jaquaranda Tree

Our families and institutions need to evolve towards making it possible for women to participate fully in all walks of life, including science. While a woman's way of life and choices might be different from that of a man, she brings her own unique insights and abilities to each profession. A woman should be judged by how meaningful her contributions are to the discipline. Genuine acceptance of diversity will go a long way towards helping future generations of women be successful in science.

Meenakshi Munshi,
Scientist 'G'/Adviser,
Department of Biotechnology, Govt.
of India

Charity always begins at home. It is the responsibility of parents initially to support girl child and be a part of her initial journey. A young women in my view needs to have strong belief in one's own self, listen to your own instinct, perseverance and hard work always pay in the long run, so don't lose patience and hope. These are the two things which will keep you going.

Devapriya Chattopadhyay,
Paleobiologist, IISER Kolkata

Change in the outlook of all members of the society irrespective of their gender would greatly help future generations of women. I strongly believe that the children of working mothers of today would make the core of responsible citizens of tomorrow. I expect them to be more sensitive, compassionate and gender neutral in their conduct. Till then, the struggle continues.

Dhanashree Paranjpe,
Ecologist, Abasaheb Garware College,
Pune

Gender bias has now become more subtle at least in big research institutes in India. We still need lot of initiatives, efforts from scientists themselves to create a level playing field. Gender

sensitization needs to be discussed on public fora, training workshops/ short modules on identifying and handling workplace harassment and other unethical practices, courses on research ethics taught at Masters and PhD level, refresher courses on “best research practices” for young and experienced scientists, greater transparency in hiring process would be some of the measures scientific community can take to increase active participation of women in scientific research. If institutes and government have clear policies on how to handle cases of unethical behaviour in science, how to “punish” wrongdoers, how to protect whistleblowers, we might retain more promising women (and men) in research. The breaks in career for childbirth, family responsibilities or any other reason are still frowned upon/ held against scientists (women and men alike) in hiring process, promotions. We collectively need to understand that career paths need not be straight and monotonous for a person to be considered as “promising” scientists. There can be detours, breaks in career which may actually bring fresh perspective, new skills to research.

Jugnu Jain,
Entrepreneur, Sapien Biosciences

We need to change the mind-frame that a woman ‘need not work’ after marriage,

or work only if in-laws ‘permit’ it, or if the family needs money. Women should exert their choices and work for pleasure. Think of science broadly. Women in science need not be in labs always – they can be teachers and administrators, technology transfer officers, lawyers including intellectual property, environmental conservation, instrumentation, policy making, data analytics, patient advocacy, scientific writing and communication, organic farming, politics, forensics, etc.

Smitha Hegde
Educator, NITTE University Centre
for Science Education and Research

Flexible working hours. Child care leave. A sick child at home means the most non-productive day at work. Nothing feels good.

Bushra Ateeq,
Molecular oncologist, IIT Kanpur

There are many initiatives by the Government of India, for example ‘Vigyan Jyoti’ scheme by Department of Science and Technology (DST) conducted at IITs and IISERs in its first phase, which provided three weeks residential camp for the brightest girl students studying in class XI, this was to motivate them to choose a career in Science & Technology at a young age. This is a fantastic initiative, but there

is a need to conduct it at mega level so that more girl students could benefit, especially from remote rural locations. The Government should also waive off application fees for girl students for the competitive exams (NEET, JEE, CSIR-JRF, UGC, GATE etc.). This will lead to many more girls to take up these competitive examinations, who unfortunately otherwise don't apply because of the financial burden or family's mindset. Other major problem is the career break, many women suffer because of family responsibilities. We

should have more schemes in place for supporting such women, for instance relaxation in age limits for government jobs, certain grant applications and academic awards. Finally, I think any positive change in the society comes from the family (home), therefore, mothers should come forward and get involved in gender-neutral parenting, which will change mindsets. This will eventually support economic independence and empowerment of women.
