



Women in Public Sector Science: From Analysis to Action

Introduction

The results of a 2017 survey of federal scientists and engineers who are PIPSC members reveal challenges that are holding women back from fully contributing their unique perspectives and expertise to federal public science. The role of women in science is now a major focus for many stakeholders in Canada and around the world because diverse perspectives enhance research excellence and innovation.

Under-representation in Science Groups

In general, women are under-represented in the Institute's core science groups. There is a low availability of women in scientific professions, and beyond this, the number of women in two major science groups (RE and NRC-RO/CO) is lower than the number of qualified women in the workforce. Also, in many cases, there is a diminishing proportion of women to men occupying higher-level positions. Fewer women than men hold government science positions, fewer women scientists are in the labour market, and fewer women apply to high-level science jobs. It's 2018 – why is this still the case?

Diminishing Concern for Women's Rights

Members under 30 were twice as likely as older members to believe that men are favoured and get better treatment in recruitment and selection processes. Older generations may perceive *less* gender bias today compared with their past experiences. The belief that gender discrimination has declined more rapidly than data shows can cause diminishing concern for women's rights and fewer resources allocated to alleviating gender inequality.

Gender Bias and Equality

Overall, 42% of women said that gender bias is a barrier to their career progression, and one in four women (27%) believed that men are favoured in opportunities for leadership roles. In 2017, some 73% of those surveyed by the Joint Union-Management Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion in the Public Service identified bias as a top barrier to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. To mitigate bias, we need to critically reflect on the notion of 'fit,' and become cognisant of our desire for sameness.

Dependent Care Responsibilities

Women were significantly more likely than men to identify dependent care responsibilities as a barrier to their career progression. Significantly fewer women than men believe they are able to satisfy both their job and family or personal responsibilities. Women continue to disproportionately bear the burden of dependent care. More could be done to evoke a cultural change, not only inside the workplace but in the wider community.

Mentorship and Leadership

One in four women (23%) said lack of access to mentors was a major barrier to their career progression. While female mentorship and role models are vital for encouraging young women to pursue STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) careers, men's participation in mentorship programs for women is also critically important.

Recommendations

PIPSC is looking to influence change for women in science by:

- 1) conducting advocacy and activism campaigns aimed at new or better workplace legislation;
- 2) collective bargaining for new and better workplace rights;
- 3) supporting consultation presidents at union-management consultation for new and improved human resources policies; and
- 4) developing and conducting awareness and education campaigns for PIPSC members.

Conclusion

The value of diversity in science extends beyond the benefits to diverse groups themselves; indeed "removing gender bias can open science and engineering to new perspectives, new questions, and new missions." Diversity is a fact and inclusion is a choice, and PIPSC is prepared to work with the federal government to make the right choice.

See the full report at: www.pipsc.ca

