Career Development and Women Scientists in Sri Lanka

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An investigation based on a postal questionnaire survey and a direct interview method study was conducted to assess the current status of women scientists in Sri Lanka and the problems they faced in career development. Of the study sample consisted of 1,628 women scientists, 65 per cent (1,058) responded, with 26 per cent of them having a Ph.Dqualification.

There was a significant ($p<0.001$) association between age and the highest academic qualification of the women scientists. The highest number of Ph.D. qualified women scientists was in the 41-50 year age group, followed by the 31-40 year age group. The absence of Ph.Ds in the below 30 age group is a reflection of the relatively late age of entry in Sri Lankan Universities and the effect of marriage and child bearing on delaying Ph.D. studies. Research productivity in terms of the number of publications was significantly ($p<0.001$) high in women scientists of age group 31-40 followed by age group 41-50, although less than those of male counterparts. Scientists involved in academic or research activities were found to produce more publications than those in engineering and technology or administration and management The promotion level of women scientists also showed a significant association ($p<0.01$) with the number of publications they produced.

Sixty eight per cent of women scientists work under a male as their immediate superior while 81 per cent of S&T sector institutions were headed by a male CEO. While no gender bias or discrimination was seen in the selection for rewards and recognition or in promotion to higher administrative positions in the S&T sector, there seemed to be indirect discrimination ($p<0.001$) in the initial recruitment of women for scientific posts, especially in private sector organizations and in some sectors like IT, engineering and technology.

Further, the respondent sample of women scientists appear to have participated extensively in training programs, seminars, and other extra-curricular activities but here too age was a factor ($p<0.01$) with the participation of those above 51 years being double that of other age categories. The grade of the scientist showed a significant association ($p<0.005$) with the opportunity to participate. This was because scientists of the senior category with more responsible roles and authority received more chances to participate than junior or middle level scientists. However such opportunities are less than those available for male scientists. There were complaints that young married female scientists or those having children were discriminated against in the selection process but the work environment discouraged protest. Women scientists were of the view that family responsibilities, cultural and social values etc., affected their chances of success when competing with men who were not less constrained by the said factors.

Problems and constraints faced by women scientists of different disciplines when conducting research were also studied.