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Distribution of women doctoral degree holders in the S&T sector of Sri Lanka and the challenges in their career development

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A study was conducted to investigate the current status of women doctoral degree holders in the field of Science and Technology in Sri Lanka, along with the problems and constraints faced by them in their career development. The postal questionnaire survey followed by the direct interview method was used to collect the necessary information. The study sample consisted of 300 female doctoral degree holders and 58% of this sample (173) responded to the survey. Most women scientists (54%) had started their Ph.D. studies during the age 31-40 yrs. The present population of doctoral degree holding women scientists comprised 51 % of scientists of the age category 41 - 50 yrs followed by 26 % in 51-60 yrs, 20% in 30-40 yrs and only 2.4% were in the above 60 yrs category. Of the total, 30 % of the women doctoral degree holders were biologists followed by 19 % agriculturists, 19% medical and health scientists, 12% chemical scientists, 5% engineers, 4% mathematicians, 3% physicists, and only 0.6% in the field of IT. Of the women scientists with Ph.D., 79% were attached to the university sector while 20 % were in R&D institutions and only 1% in S&T service sector institutions. The top Management (CEOs) in the S&T institutions having Ph.D. including universities were represented by 18% of females and this was only 3.5% of the total women doctoral degree holders in the country. Of the women doctoral degree holders 67% mentioned that their prime job activity was teaching in higher education institutes, while 16 % were in research and development and 4% in administration and management. With regard to relevance of their job to the degree, 39% mentioned that it was "directly related" while 61% said "somewhat related" and only 0.6% stated "not related at all. Adequate funding for research projects, lack of residence facilities close to their working place, limited access to information and inadequate internet facilities in their institutions were mentioned as constraints to their career prospects. Personal problems such as family responsibilities, children and other cultural values were also said to affect the career prospects of women scientists. However, the analysis showed that there is no gender bias or discrimination when selecting for rewards, recognition or promotions etc., in the S&T sector. Nevertheless, an indirect discrimination seemed to appear in the recruitment of women for science careers, selection for higher administrative positions, representations in professional and management bodies in the government institutions which is an issue to be addressed at the policy level.

Keywords: Women scientists, doctoral degree, S&T, career development, Sri Lanka