

# Female academics excluded from recognition and equal pay: study<sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

They battle "cronyism." They make less money than their colleagues. They take care of kids or parents after work. Two decades after women began to outnumber men on university campuses, those gains in the student population haven't translated into many victories for female researchers and faculty.

These are the conclusions of a new report, commissioned by the federal government two years ago after a prominent research granting program failed to choose even one woman for 19 awards. The 252-page study from the Council of Canadian Academies presents a highly critical look at the barriers limiting the progress of women's academic careers and argues that Canada is not fulfilling its commitments to gender equity as a result.

Instead, powerful stereotypes and institutional arrangements are excluding women from consideration for recognition and promotion.

Indira Samarasekera, an engineering professor who is now president of the University of Alberta, says the situation has improved since she was a young parent but now, as then, child care remains women's biggest challenge in academia. When she had her second child in May, 1982, she wasn't offered the maternity leave that is now common. "I remember the head of my department saying, 'You will come back in September to teach, won't you?' " she said. "I didn't have a choice."

Researchers wanting to advance their careers still need to attend conferences and travel for field work, she added. "There are huge pressures and long waiting lists for daycare. We as a society haven't figured out how to accommodate it all," she said.

Child care affects all parents, but the report also argues some pressures, such as the publication and service record required for tenure, are specific to universities.

"We were surprised at some [findings]," said Lorna Marsden, the former president of York University who chaired the report. "Here is a group of women who are highly motivated, have been highly educated, and yet somehow something goes on that means they don't turn up as often as full professors, they don't get their findings published in the [academic] journals."

But it was clear that subtle biases in hiring and promotions are still pervasive - often unintentionally. Women represent a third of all full-time faculty, but just 21.7 per cent of full professors in Canada. "A lot of times it's perception in people's head, and that's because the perception is based on male characteristics to advance, and then women may present different characteristics," said Catherine Mavriplis, an engineering professor at the University of Ottawa who holds a national chair for women in science and engineering.

The report was commissioned in 2010 by then-Industry Minister Tony Clement after the Canada Excellence Research Chairs program - an ambitious venture designed to poach star researchers from abroad - chose only men. An initial ad-hoc committee appointed by the federal government had recommended a deeper look at gender issues inside universities.

Gaps in recognition can subtly undermine the confidence of female faculty. Hind Al-Abadleh, who in 2005 was the first woman hired to Wilfrid Laurier University's chemistry department, filed a formal grievance early this year when the university didn't reward her with a faculty merit award for earning several local and international distinctions.

"That was the moment when I felt something is wrong," she said. Dr. Al-Abadleh lost her grievance, but was given the award in the next round of selections, even though she hadn't amassed notable new accomplishments in the interim.

"Honestly, it didn't feel as good," she said. "Was I rewarded because of my accomplishments, or because I filed a grievance?"

Gary Goodyear, federal Minister of State for Science and Technology, said "it is too early to speculate on what actions the government will take to address this important issue," but noted the percentage of Canada research chairs held by women has doubled to 26 per cent since 2001.

The government's ad-hoc panel, which included Dr. Samarasekera, had tweaked the selection process for CERCs to attract more women in the next round of 11 chairs, being recruited now. Universities must provide names of women they will actively pursue, while four chairs have been earmarked for non-science disciplines where the talent pool of women is currently deeper.

"The real issue behind all of this is mobilizing as much of Canada's talent as possible," Dr. Marsden said. "Many [women] are not having the

same access as men. And if that holds for women, it would hold for other minority groups in our society."

## KEY FINDINGS

Biases in recruitment and evaluation of women academics can negatively impact career trajectories.

A persistent salary gap - with even full professors making 95 per cent of male salaries - can have effects over the long term, including in pension payments.

Women in universities spend more time on childcare than men, and promotion and tenure processes lack exit and re-entry points that would make a career more flexible.

Socialization and stereotypes define social roles and female students report lower levels of self-confidence in physical sciences, computer science, engineering and mathematics.

There is a disconnect between the subjects students study in high school and their career goals, particularly in science and math fields.

-reprinted from the Globe and Mail

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** gender <sup>[3]</sup>

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