

# Roadblocks in research for women

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Societal gender biases can discourage women from pursuing careers in research, and this can start from when young women start their research-based theses.

Interest in research begins with a good teacher or professor who awakens a sense of curiosity in you and keeps you on the pursuit to figure out why things are the way they are, and if they can be modified for the better. If you are lucky enough, you get a chance to work in a good research lab during your undergraduate thesis, and that is when you get first-hand exposure on how scientific research labs work for the first time.

However, what if you were unlucky and were told you should not focus on scientific research because of your gender?

Being a female research student myself, I have noticed specific trends in how society perceives the work women do in labs. The first thing I have observed is the concern for whether a woman will be able to manage work hours and the hours she may need to spend time at home; the only problem with which is how a work-home balance should be a general concern and not one just limited to women.

Women are still the only ones subjected to comments such as “How will you balance working in a research lab for long hours and taking care of your kids?”, whereas this concern should apply to everyone interested in research, regardless of gender.

If you believe research is your true calling, listening to snide remarks from a never-before-seen relative about work-personal life balance would quickly become tiresome. All interested individuals should be able to participate in research according to their qualifications, not based on their gender.

For the future development of research in our country, it is essential that individuals keen on research are never suggested otherwise on account of their gender. The more people actively participating in research, the more scope it creates for improvement in the quality of research and facilities.

It is also saddening how people bring up comparisons of the pay scale for research keeping in mind the effort put in, pointing out how one can be paid much more handsomely with less effort and casually adding in how women would just be better at home.

Contrary to concerns that arise because of the mentality of the members of society, more tangible barriers to women



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researchers also exist. Sometimes it is necessary to travel long distances in order to retrieve chemicals or buy laboratory apparatus or machinery. This can pose safety threats to women depending on the area required to be visited, and the mode of transportation taken. As a result, sometimes women simply opt out of this or are advised that it is best that they opt out of travelling to such places.

However, going to these places allow you to build connections and find sources of suppliers for chemicals or apparatus or laboratory services which

can prove to be of use in the long run, as explained by \*Sameera Bashir, a student of Biochemistry from a leading private university in Dhaka. She mentioned how although she understands why safety precautions are recommended for female students travelling distances for research purposes, she was concerned about her networking skills and contacts could which would have definitely helped her with research-based jobs in the future, and how she feels she may be missing out.

Not everyone has had such experiences, though. Dedicated female students have defied all odds and gone on to prove how gender has nothing to do with the contribution a person can make to science. I myself have a supportive supervisor, as does Anika Tursa Promi, a Biochemistry and Biotechnology major at Independent University, Bangladesh.

She said, “As a woman, I’ve been fortunate to work comfortably on my thesis without any pressure or discrimination

from family or faculties. Not just while working on my thesis, my faculties have always been considerate and supportive of my work or need regardless of my gender as they have always been forthcoming in helping and guiding me.”

In a discussion about this article, Muniza Mehrin Zaman, a neuroscience research student now studying in Canada, explained to me why she loves what she does, “Research gives me the chance to explore unlimited possibilities which is what is so intriguing about it. You don’t know what you might stumble upon.”

I could not have explained the reasoning behind my love for research better, and remain in hope of one day when a larger number of girls keen on research can feel the same.

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