

Addressing concerns of women in science

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BANGALORE: What does it take to retain women in the area of scientific research?

Studies conducted by the Indian National Science Academy reflect growing number of women enrolling themselves for University education in medicine, engineering and pure sciences, but these numbers are not reflected in the area of research itself, where women are not in significant numbers.

To tackle this problem, the Indian Academy of Sciences formed a panel for Women in Science to address the concerns and also to come up with suggestions for a possible action plan to the policy makers. One

of the initiatives pursued by this panel is a study on the reasons for the loss of trained scientific women.

Prof Rohini Godbole of the Centre for High Energy Physics at Indian Institute of Science (IISc), who chairs the panel, says that the idea is to track down women who have PhD in pure and applied sciences, medicine and engineering, but have chosen careers in other fields.

"Social and family reasons are quite common for women not pursuing research, but it is not the only reason. Our study will shed more light on some of the problems faced by women and attempt to provide solutions to overcome this. My purpose is to start a dialogue and

the survey we are doing is one of the steps to be taken. The reasons may be well known, but documenting it makes a difference," Rohini says.

But tracking the women has not been an easy task. Since the women, who were to be a part of the study were those who had already left science, there was no real starting point.

"We have managed to get around 10 per cent in our database. At times, we have just gone to the professors and borrowed their student lists and contacted them" she confesses. The survey also includes men who are pursuing science, who will be given a questionnaire on the same categories to compare reasons.

For the first time, the panel constitutes scientists as well as social scientists.

"Not all solutions are very complicated. The simple solutions often do not get advocated, because we do not ask the scientists for an opinion. Minor changes like a good creche near the workplace or accommodations close to the workplace makes a big difference," she claims.

The panel is also promoting workshops in colleges and schools, where women scientists involved in cutting edge research discuss their work and increase awareness among girl students to promote research as a career choice.

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