

Women in STEM: Experts suggest mentoring, support networks

During the International Women's Day celebrations, Rohini Godbole recounted several scenarios where she encountered gender discrimination

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Representative image. Credit: Getty images

The major hurdle for women scientists is others doubting their capabilities or believing they aren't serious about science, said Prof Rohini Godbole, Padma Shri awardee and theoretical physicist at IISc.

During the International Women's Day celebrations at IISc on Wednesday, she recounted several scenarios where she encountered gender discrimination.

"Positive mentoring is key in developing women's abilities in science," she said. Also, women should seek help from support structures like family networks, instead of trying to be superwomen who manage their careers and family entirely by themselves.

"If individual women are unable to build support structures, institutions should do it for them," Prof Rohini said.

Padma Shri awardee and mathematician Sujatha Ramadurai, now a professor at University of British Columbia, said supportive networks and infrastructure for women is still missing in India. "Whereas universities abroad now have daycare facilities at conference venues, funding for women in science, information sharing on how to tackle interviews, etc."

She said women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) have invisible barriers. "They are made invisible by male colleagues who don't cite their research paper. Or if they initiate a programme, it is later discussed as men's achievement."

Former WHO chief scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan said academic/policymaking conferences in India often have all-male participation only. And opportunities like science scholarships during school years can bring more girls into science.

InSTEM director Prof Manisha Inamdar said that several aspects like lack of accommodation and transport to conferences are also hurdles for women more than men.

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