Status of Women in the National Labs

A Brief Summary of Current Knowledge from COACH Research

G.L. Richmond and J. Stockard

October 2015
Data Sources

Internet-based surveys – three sites
- Women only at two sites and both men and women at one
- One lab near a large city, one in more rural setting, one very closely tied with a university (but very small sample)

Interviews – two sites

Group discussion/focus groups – one site

Workshops – two sites
Satisfaction with Work Life and Career
(Women only)

Relatively high satisfaction (>70% somewhat or very satisfied) with access to supplies and equipment, journals and scholarly material and “overall” with their job

Lower satisfaction (<40% satisfied)
  • recognition of accomplishments by others
  • mentoring from others in department
  • scholarly productivity

Women at the lab with close ties with a University were more satisfied
Lab Women Have More Concerns than Academic Women in Some Areas (5=very concerned)

- Advance in current position
- Keeping up with field
- Advancing to more responsibility*
- Finding mentor to help career*
- Making progress in my field of work
- Establishing cred outside institution*
- Establishing credibility where work

Legend:
- Lab
- Academic
Relatively Low Confidence of Lab Women in Ability to Control Career-Related Areas

Half (51% to 56%) moderately or very confident could
• balance work and family responsibilities in a personally satisfying way
• provide convincing arguments in group settings
• get support from colleagues in workplace

Less than 20% (7% to 18%) were confident they could
• negotiate successfully for own career
• control career destiny
• receive deserved recognition from department
• receive deserved recognition from profession

Lab Women Associated with University More Confident
Men Have Fewer Career-Related Concerns and Are More Satisfied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concern w/ Career Advance</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern w/ credibility</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Resources</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat. w/ Workload and Demands</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Related Satisfaction*</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Scale: 1 = Strongly Dissatisfied, 5 = Strongly Satisfied
Men More Confident in Attaining Potential and Receiving Career-Related Advice

- Value of advice given
- Number of colleagues can turn to for support
- Confidence in communication skills
- Can get deserved recognition and support
- Can have support and achieve potential

![Chart showing comparison between women and men]

Legend:
- Orange: Women
- Blue: Men
Men More Likely than Women to Perceive that Female Employees and Minority Employees are Treated Fairly

Racial/ethnic minority employees treated fairly*

Female employees treated fairly*

Women  Men

COACH
Interviews

26 at lab near large urban center
  • All women
  • Self selected

12 at large lab in more rural area
  • Both men and women
  • Chosen by administrators
Common Themes from Interviews – Site 1

Positive Areas
• Great enthusiasm for their work and their science
• Support receive from others, including a women scientist group
• Diversity of staff
• Location of lab and facilities and programs, including childcare

Problematic Areas
• Lack of validation of work
• Lack of transparency in procedures and policies and variability from one area of lab to another
• Few opportunities for professional advancement
• Negative experiences with Office of Human Resources
• Unskilled, insensitive managers who have problems dealing with issues including those related to gender
Common Themes – Site 2

Positive Elements
• Love of science and work that can do at the lab
• Support received in start-up and moving
• Flexibility in schedules

Problematic Areas
• Lack of transparency and variability from one area of lab to another
• Unskilled, insensitive managers, unwilling/unable to counter sexist interactions
• Lack of mobility, advancement opportunities, flat structure
• Lack of on-site childcare
• General climate produced by very low representation of women
• Desire for change but strong administrative roadblocks
Some preliminary general observations

There are issues related to gender equity at the labs
Variability across labs
Variability within labs
Some common issues are related to structural factors (e.g. flat structure, lack of transparency, power of HR relative to scientists)
Other issues related to reluctance or inability to tap expertise and energy within the labs to address issues (e.g. issue of perceived “small pool” of qualified women and lack of child care)
Strong desire for a more equitable environment

• Expressed by both women and men
• Indicates the possibility of change
This research was sponsored by the Department of Energy, Basic Energy Sciences, Materials Science and Engineering; Materials Chemistry and Biomolecular Materials Division, DF-FOA-0000600.