



Academic women and the challenges they face; their stories then and now

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Research carried out by BFWG in England and Wales

WHO New, mid career and retired academic women working in/retired from universities in England and Wales All employed in teaching research or major leadership roles in HEIs

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HOW Semi structured interviews to tell their stories

AGES Ages ranged from late 20s to women in their 60s/70s

WHERE from Oxbridge Russell group 'red brick' ex-polytechnics of 1992 and the post 2000 private unis.



DISCIPLINES engineering to sciences of all kinds arts and social sciences

POSTS newly employed, post-docs in temporary positions; teaching only staff; research staff; those in management roles eg. Head of Dept. Dean Prof. Chair, VC etc.

QUESTIONS

- Asked what challenges they faced in their career
- Their satisfaction with what they have achieved
- Their concerns for their future careers or those of younger women
- Equality? evidence of discrimination in pay, promotion treatment race age etc.
- What support was given and by whom?
- Have things changed or are challenges the same?
- Would they advise young women to follow them?

What concerns have been raised in research on women in universities?

- Lack of promotion opportunities
- Males tend to hold the power with roles and responsibility
- Men paid more for same role
- Child bearing can affect career progress - affects women more than men
- Sexual harassment by staff and students
- Publication of papers in journals by women less likely to occur and men cite male authors not women
- Black women paid less than white women, discrimination in promotion
- Women not good at self promotion men are

- ‘Old boys’ club’ mentalities
- Women tend to like research using ethnographic approaches men go for figures, former deemed less important than latter.
- Casualization of employment for young academics m/w
- Massive increase in workloads
- Women’s lack of self belief
- Women scientists complain of bullying, harassment and thwarted careers
- Women in academic positions volunteer for mundane tasks; men do not - they serve on committees and shout women down when they outnumber them etc.



Findings so far

No particular match between equality and success on which type of uni. you are looking at – **they all have their own cultures**

Older women

- Sexual harassment by senior male staff they did not complain as it was deemed normal but now it is more likely to be students
- Many had never married or had children
- Women expected to **give way** to men in the **promotion** race
- Child bearing could lead to **lack of opportunity** for promotion
- Workloads are now ridiculous **used to have admin support** that has disappeared
- Women expected to make the coffee act as secretaries to important male colleagues **'old boys' clubs' ruled the day**

- ‘If you **don’t go to the pub and play golf** you are not part of the action’
- .Men ignore my contributions in meetings **then repeat what I have said and the other men praise what they say’**
- I was told not to bother applying for promotion in that uni as **‘you will never get it’**
- ‘I had to follow what the men in the science area wanted in research that is quantitative, whereas I prefer qualitative studies giving more information about the effects on people.’ **I was told it was unscientific and would get me nowhere’**
- I was approached by the research professor who told me **that if I slept with him he could offer me research opportunities** His colleagues tried to protect us young staff from his slimy approaches but no one complained
- We had a **sexual predator in the uni who was a vicar** but not only pestered staff but slept with students every body knew but no one did anything

- Older women **had more varied careers than younger women** they believed gave them more skills than the PhD to Post doc to lecturer
- Many had attempts at **promotion blocked by senior men**
- Research approaches had **to fit into male ideas of research**
- Found the support given **to men by men solid** women did not support each other - **men network and bond**
- Women **not offered good mentoring** expected to find out the rules by themselves.
- Great **inequality of pay rates** particularly for similar senior roles All ages reported secrecy about pay and starting rates for lecturer scales nothing has changed in that area

Younger women

- Considered **themselves equal to men** - had seen positive discrimination in a unis' attempt to balance gender unbalanced depts.
- No talk of sexism but '**unconscious bias**' from men
- Challenges **getting a full time position** and now often teaching or research - not both
- Research post docs positions = doing **research ruled by others** using **funding provided by outsiders** which is variable = **job uncertainty**
- Men and women now **seeing similar challenges** with uni. funds reducing and job security not good
- **No sexual harassment** complaints but concern for female students who were suffering from this problem from their male peers

- Ethnic minority women **racial bias from colleagues** - promotion was difficult
- **Brexit** had affected working relationships.
- **Workload**, lack of time to research, pressures of family life were high on the agenda
- Lack of **admin support** added greatly to workload
- Need for more support for the **costs of childcare** and availability of **nursery places** in unis
- Some unis are **keen to help** with family responsibilities for both men and women others **do not help but hinder-late or early meetings** etc.
- A few unis now supporting men as well as women in child care duties and **expecting men to take half the available leave**

What can be done to improve the position of women in HEIs?

- **Positive discrimination** ?- Ireland set up women only professorships – our respondents did not like that idea
- **Better mentoring** and support many had to go elsewhere for help
- **Men** (especially scientists) being helped to understand what it feels like **to be 'patronised, patted on the head, told you look lovely etc'** rather than them really appreciating and listening to the contributions of women
- **Blind reviews** of papers submitted for publication in top journals
- **Biggest wish** better childcare and support for family life men need to play a bigger part in this too as most of it falls onto women
- **Better support** for those returning from childbirth to bring them up to speed

Most notable findings

- The format of progress to HEI employment - First degree Masters – Doctorate - Post Docs - HEI tutor maybe by mid 30s is **MAD and affects both men and women**
- All the younger women were seriously worried **if they could ever have children and a career as childbirth seemed to sideline women from promotion especially if they had to go part time**
- **Royal Society of Chemistry** in their 2018 report said we are wasting the talents of so many women scientists it is a disgrace (it is not just scientists – we are wasting talents in many disciplines).
- **There is still a long long way to go for women** to achieve equality in academic life – we do have some VCs etc. but not in proportion to the employment stats. of males females in HEIs



BUT would they recommend the life?



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They would encourage other women to follow them but look at other professions too and be realistic about the workload and stress

Go Girls!



“Be brave! Build your self-confidence to go to the next step and the next - to the very top. Believe in yourself and put yourself forward.”

Dame Lynne Brindley

Academic & former CEO of British Library

#PledgeForParity

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals supports **International Women's Day**.

A final note

UK HAS NOT IMPROVED EQUALITY IN THE WORK PLACE IN THE LAST 10 YEARS (EC 2017)

I had the chance of an HEI career and children and obtained my qualifications whilst working

We appear in some ways to be going backwards!

Thanks for your attention