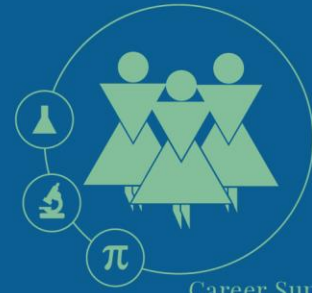


Part V:

The Work-Life Equilibrium: In-Balance or Imbalance?

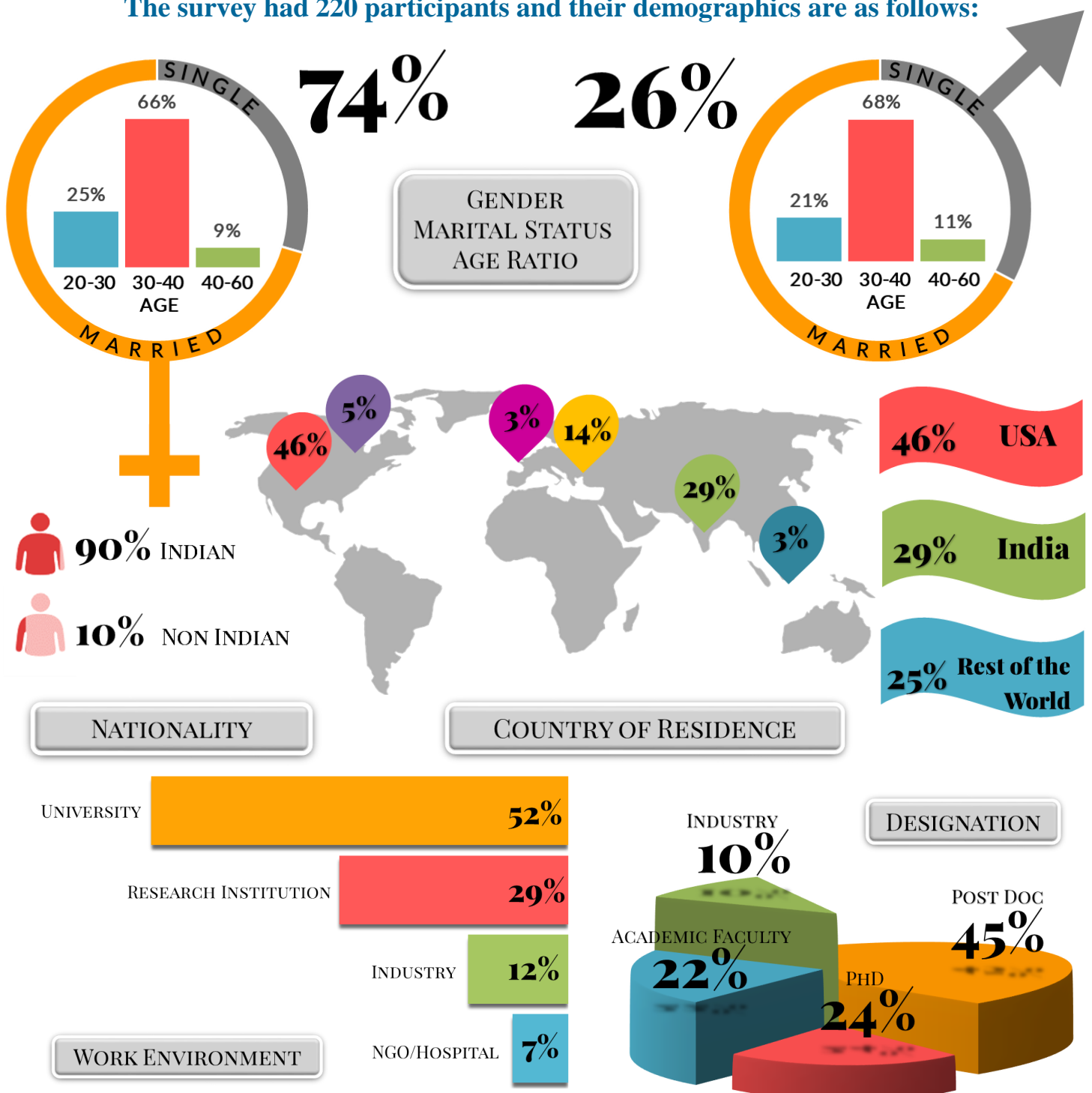


Career Support Group
Women in Science



In early 2018, a [post](#) on Career Support Group (CSG) asking about the challenges faced by women in their work place/graduate school, got an overwhelming response. There were stories and struggles shared, but also support and willingness to take action. This led to the inception of Women in Science (WiS) sub-group of the PhD [Career Support Group \(CSG\)](#), a group of volunteers both women and men who care about the challenges faced by women in their lives. This survey is a part of an initiative to identify and address gaps in the support received by women researchers in a professional STEM environment and will be published as a 5-part series on [ClubSciWri](#).

The survey had 220 participants and their demographics are as follows:



The Work-Life Equilibrium: In-Balance or Imbalance?

Aishwarya Swaminathan, PhD and Siddarth Chandrasekaran, PhD

“My boss is definitely not supportive of my personal life.”

– Female postdoc in the U.S.A.

“I resigned from my position when my PI became passive-aggressive toward me after I started a family.”

– Male postdoc in India.

“Had I continued in research, there would be no work-life balance.”

– Female freelancer in Canada.

“At academic research institutes, no one follows work timings.”

– Female postdoc in the U.S.A.

“Demand and pressure from boss makes you forgo personal life. I guess this is the case of everyone in research.”

– Female postdoc in the U.S.A.



Introduction

The CSG-Women in Science (CSG-WiS) team conducted a survey in 2018 to understand whether there is bias against women in the STEM field and what measures exist, if any, to tackle these discrepancies [1, 2, 3, 4]. In this five-part series we have attempted to understand factors that hinder growth, progress and sustenance of women in the STEM field. The previous sections of the survey analyzed (a) whether women received support from their peers and colleagues at the workplace, (b) whether women face gender bias in the workplace, and (b) if they received the help they needed to overcome discrimination and/or bias. Conscious or unconscious bias against women in the workplace in STEM research is a leading factor in this disproportionate representation of women in science. The results reveal that (a) women are less likely to receive support from colleagues (both men and women) [1], (b) they face gender discrimination at their workplace [2], (c) there are a lack of measures that help address the issues, and (d) when measures do exist, it is often difficult to utilize them owing to difficulty in accessing these measures [3]. Our results also show that there are fewer women in leadership positions in STEM [4] presumably due to preexisting biases. In this section we assess whether these biases affect a woman's ability to maintain a work-life balance. We also assess if workplaces try to provide the kind of support that is required to achieve this balance.

The above statements are excerpts from comments made by participants in the CSG-WiS survey. They suggest that workplaces, especially academia, rarely have measures in place to ensure that employees can achieve work-life balance in the STEM field. Long (often unconventional) work hours and poor pay of early career scientists make it hard on young researchers to sustain this balancing act, whether they are men or women. Couple this with the fact that women of child bearing age need some special allowances during pregnancy, child birth and child rearing, it adds an extra layer of complication in trying to balance one's personal and professional life. There is evidence that there are fewer women in research [5] and that women quit their careers in science in pursuit of motherhood [6,7]. Further, children are more likely to hurt the income of women but not men [8]. Even in Scandinavia, which is considered to foster an extremely family friendly work environment, women who work full-time are paid 15 percent to 20 percent less than men - a gender pay gap similar to that in the United States [9]. A part of the

reason for this is that women with children take up less competitive jobs with typically lower pay or work part-time. But the decrease in pay is not proportional to the cutback on the hours. Why is this so? Why are career and parenthood mutually exclusive for women?

Methods

This article summarizes the results of section 7 of the CSG-WiS survey to assess the work-life balance policies for women researchers in a professional environment. 219 participants were asked four questions to understand if:

- ↪ Workplace policies help them to manage their professional and personal lives
- ↪ Supervisors were supportive of their personal lives
- ↪ Workplace had policies in place for taking parental/sick/ personal leave of absence
- ↪ Workplace offered childcare related support

Answers to questions 1 and 2 are qualitative in nature and are based on the participant's perception of the support they received from their workplace and supervisor. The answers to questions 3 and 4 are more direct and therefore quantified. Statistical significance (wherever determined) was performed by doing a paired t-test comparing the proportion of men and women in each category.

Results

A majority of the survey's participants (66%) are in the age group of 30-40. Generally, this is the age demographic that begins to experience an increase in responsibilities on the home front finding the need to prioritize and ration time between work and personal life. Therefore the following results, especially the responses discussed in sections one and two are likely to over represent the perceptions of people in this age group.

Do workplace policies allow employees to balance professional and personal lives?

Participants were asked whether their general workplace policies allowed them to manage their professional and personal lives.

- i. Overall, about half the participants felt that their workplace policies allowed them to always or mostly balance their professional and personal life. Both men and women share this feeling equally (Figure 1a).

Interestingly, about 65% of the people in this category comprise of graduate students and postdocs from across the world.

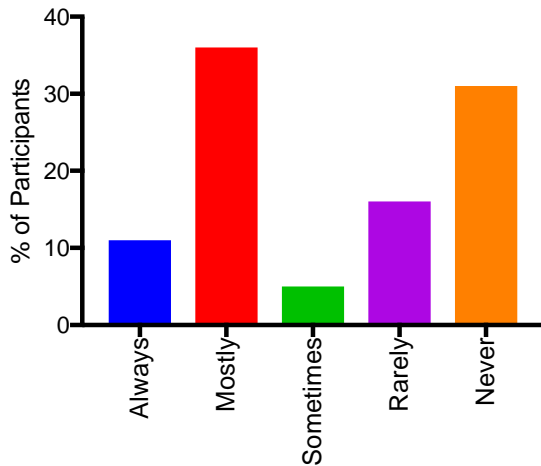


Figure 1a: Summary of responses showing whether general workplace policies allow people to maintain a work-life balance.

ii. The people who felt otherwise were all trainees (PhD students or postdocs) at various institutes around the world. There is no difference (p value = 0.89) between men and women in their perception of whether their workplace allows them to maintain a work-life balance (Figure 1b).

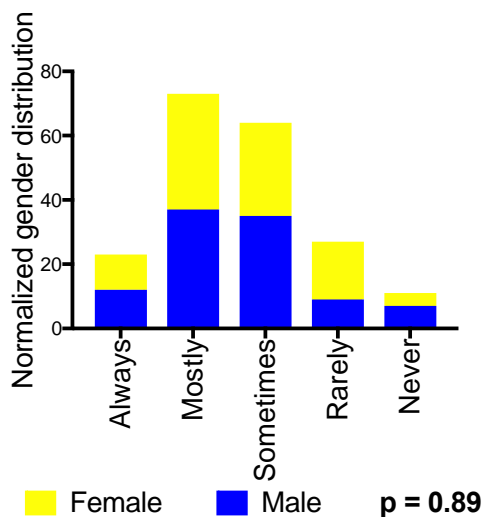


Figure 1b: There is no difference between how men and women perceive their workplace in allowing them to balance work and personal lives. p value = 0.89 when comparing men to women in each category.

iii. Interestingly, this feeling was shared equally across all ages from 20-50. The two participants in the 50-60 age group were at least somewhat satisfied with how their workplace policies affect their work-life balance. Since this age group is grossly underrepresented in our survey we cannot speculate if the results would have varied with more participants.

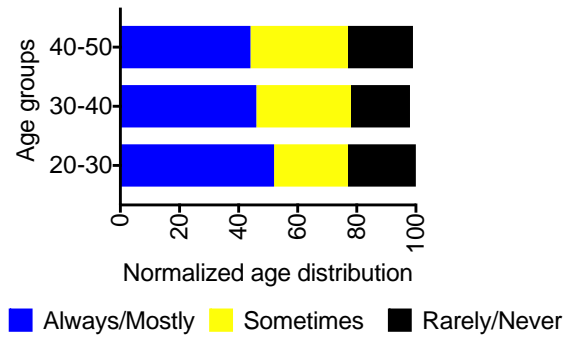


Figure 1c: Perception of people in different age demographics on their workplace policies allowing work-life balance.

iv. When we analyzed the data by separating single (68) and married (141) people, a curious trend appeared (figure 1d). Approximately half the married men (18 out of 35) and women (55 out of 106) and single men (9 out of 19) felt that their workplace either “always” or “mostly” allowed them to balance their personal and professional lives. But only about 35% of single women (17 out of 46) felt this way. Similarly about 20% of married men and women felt that their workplaces “rarely” or “never” allowed them to balance their personal and professional lives; fewer single (11%) men felt this way. But interestingly, 33% of single women felt that their workplace policies didn’t allow them to maintain a work-life balance.

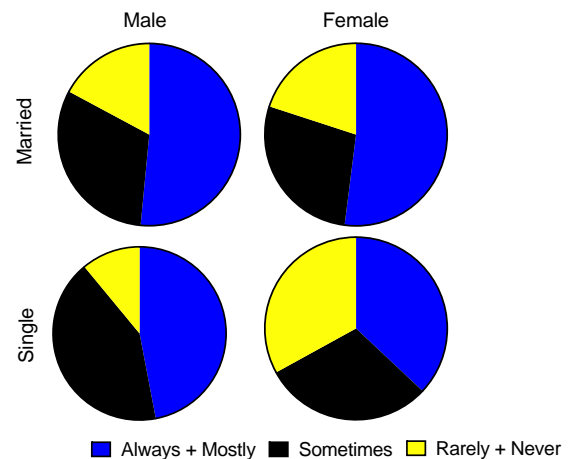


Figure 1d: The effect of marital status on work-life balance.

These results indicate that about half the people in the STEM field are satisfied with their work-life balance. Both men and women across all age groups and people at various stages of their career and/or training feel this way. Still, that leaves the remaining half who are not satisfied with their work-life balance. Also, single women are least satisfied with their work-life balance. Is this because they are overworked more than others? Do they succumb to peer pressure to work longer and

harder to remain competitive due to the bias they are likely to face at their workplace?

Do supervisors allow trainees and/or employees to balance professional and personal lives?

In academia where students and postdocs are considered both employees and trainees in many countries, the lines of what institutional policies apply to them, start to blur. In these cases, whatever the immediate supervisor/mentor says, goes unquestioned usually. In many cases, when the trainee approaches the institute for clarification, the institutes refer them back to their supervisor. This is especially true in case of maternity and/or paternity leave. It also applies to amount of sick and vacation time that a trainee is allowed to take in an academic year.

Keeping this in mind, we next asked the participant's whether their immediate supervisor or manager was supportive of them taking personal leave for reasons including but not limited to pregnancy, maternity/paternity leave, adoption and illness.

i. Most responders felt that their supervisor was supporting or at least neutral towards this (figure 2a). Interestingly, all the people who never discussed it with their supervisors were academic trainees – graduate students and postdocs.

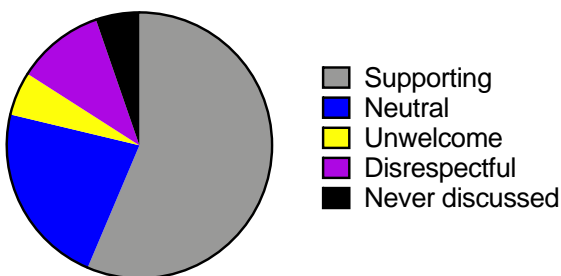


Figure 2a: Perceived level of support of participants from their immediate supervisor.

ii. In part 1 of this series of articles [1], we saw that a same-sex bias exists when forming collaborations or mentoring. Female group leaders, colleagues and collaborators are more likely to not offer support to a woman. We asked if this trend exists when supervisors offer support to their trainees in attaining work-life balance. We find that ~75% of both men and women working with male supervisors find that their supervisor is supportive / neutral toward balancing their personal life. Interestingly, while polling people with female supervisors, we find that fewer male

trainees (68%) than female trainees (78%) felt that their supervisor was supportive of their personal life.

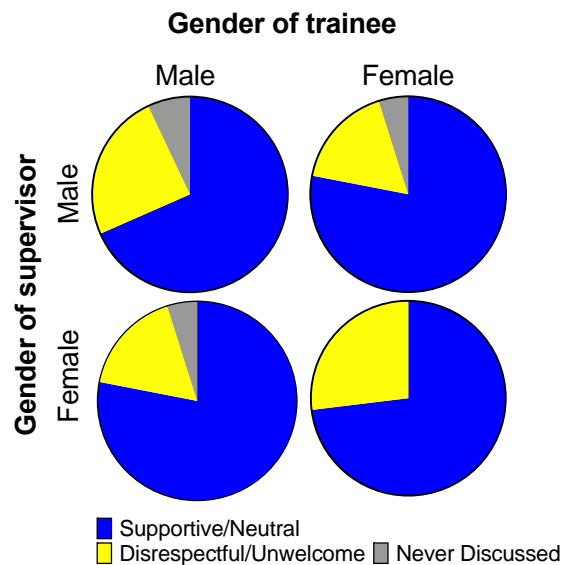


Figure 2b: Analysis of effect of gender of supervisor on support received by trainees.

- iii. More male trainees felt that their supervisor was unsupportive (~25%) of their personal life whether their supervisor was male or female. In contrast only ~16% of female trainees felt unsupported by their supervisor.
- iv. Twelve participants, all postdocs (1:1 ratio of male: female) from across the globe also experienced passive aggressive behavior from their supervisors upon returning from personal leave. In an example of an extreme case, a trainee who took the survey revealed that they resigned from their position because their supervisor upon returning from family leave harassed them. This point highlights the need to examine our attitude in academia and provide opportunities for trainees to have a life beyond work.
- v. Despite these discrepancies, there is no difference between men and women in how much support they receive from their supervisors (p value = 0.74). Interestingly, once again, there is an almost equal distribution of men and women in each category of support received (figure 2c).

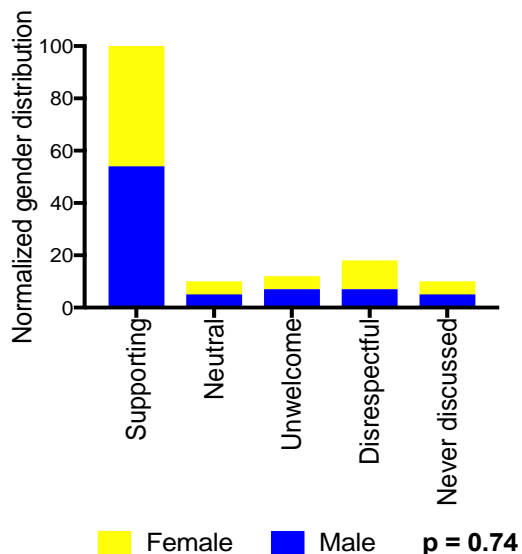


Figure 2c: Distribution of men and women based on the support they receive from their supervisor.

These results are in contrast to the results of part 1 of this series of articles [1] where gender bias exists when helping a colleague or trainee or forming collaborations to advance one's career. Here, it appears that while there may be abrasive behavior in the context of career, most supervisors whether male or female, are generally supportive of their trainee's / employee's personal life.

Maternity / Paternity / Sick leave policies at workplaces.

Maternity and paternity leave are forms of "breaks" given to parents immediately upon the birth of a child. This time period varies drastically across countries [10]. Sick time is time given to employees and trainees to recover from all other illnesses. We assessed whether workplaces provide employees and trainees with enough maternity/paternity/sick leave.

i. Most workplaces fair slightly better at making accommodations for maternity leave but not so often for paternity leave (Figure 3a).

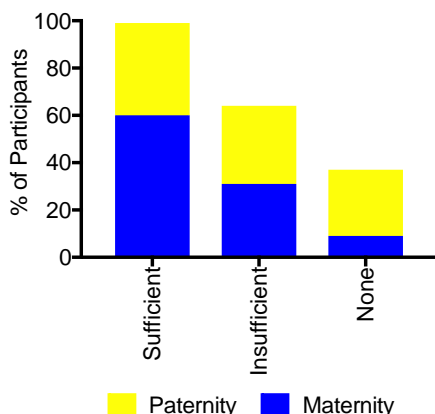


Figure 3a: Percentage of participants who do/do not receive maternity and/or paternity leave from their workplace.

ii. About 60% of survey-takers with insufficient/no maternity leave work in academia (Figure 3b).

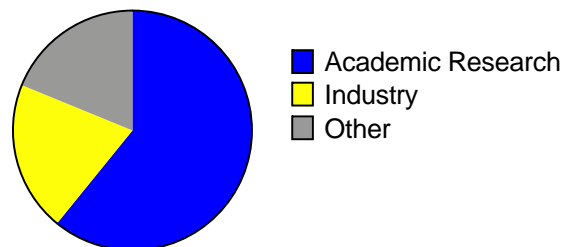


Figure 3b: Workplace distribution of people with insufficient / no maternity leave.

iii. As shown in figure 3c, only 45% of all people in the U.S.A have sufficient maternity leave compared to India (68%) and the rest of the world (81%).

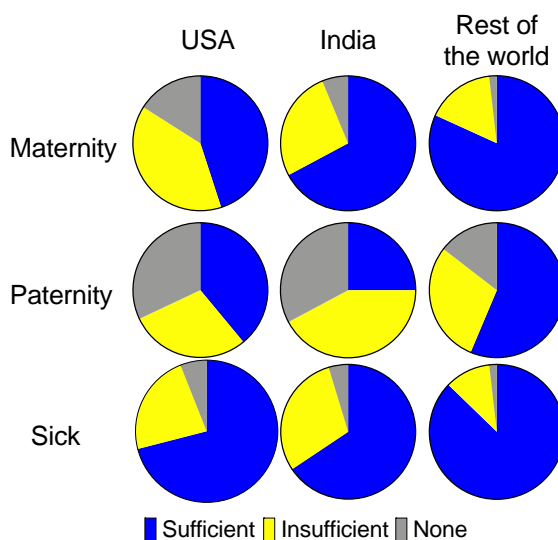


Figure 3c: Maternity/paternity/sick leave policies separated by geographical distribution.

iv. Even though the rest of the world provides less paternity leave than maternity leave, it still fares better than USA and India (Figure 3c).

v. In general, about 70% trainees and employees in USA and India get sufficient sick leave compared to 87% in the rest of the world.

vi. Whereas 75% of people with enough sick time worked for academia, only 62% of people in industry get enough sick leave- so while academia provides time to recover from sickness, there is very little accommodation for maternity or paternity leave.

These results indicate that there is room for improvement in both the U.S.A and India in providing maternity and paternity leave. All over the world there are still highly trained and skilled STEM graduates who work with insufficient or no parental and/or sick leave. The ability to take time off when sick or after pregnancy should be a universal right, which it isn't right now.

Workplace policies on providing childcare support.

In the STEM field, nearly 50% of women and 28% of all parents in the U.S.A leave their full-time position after the birth of their first child [11, 12]. Having an infrastructural and/or monetary support system is likely to encourage employees and trainees to return to work after the birth of a child. With this in mind, we asked participants if and what type of childcare / support options are available to them through their workplace. Here, we loosely define childcare options as any measure that is provided by the workplace to support employees with children. We broadly divided these into these categories (participants could pick any and all options that were available to them):

- ↪ Nursing room – a place where new mothers can pump breast milk and/or breastfeed their child. This room would require a comfortable chair, a table to set up the breast pump, an electrical outlet for the breast pump, running water, a sink, and a microwave to clean and sterilize the equipment after use.
- ↪ Subsidized childcare – Onsite daycare where the tuition is made affordable with a subsidy.
- ↪ Diaper changing station in ladies toilet only – a set up in the toilet that would allow for changing and properly disposing soiled diapers.
- ↪ Extension of work contract to cover the personal leave – For example, the family medical leave act in the U.S.A guarantees that an employee will not lose their job following maternity leave.
- ↪ Flexible HR policy – other policies put forth by the human resources department in their workplace that would allow an employee to provide adequate care to their child while they are at work.
- ↪ Career support programs (meeting, workshop etc.) to empower working mothers.

- i. 28% of survey takers do not have access to child care support (Figure 4a). Almost all these individuals work for academia or non-profit organizations.

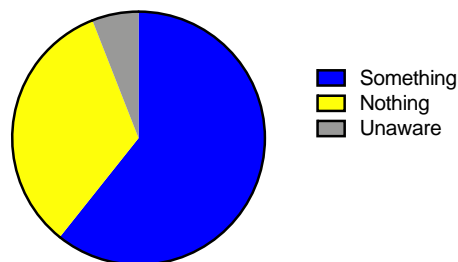


Figure 4a: Distribution of the availability of various childcare options to participants.

- ii. 67% have some form of child care support through their workplace (Figure 4a). This support varies approximately equally from the availability of diaper changing stations in the restrooms to subsidized childcare centers on site (Figure 4b).

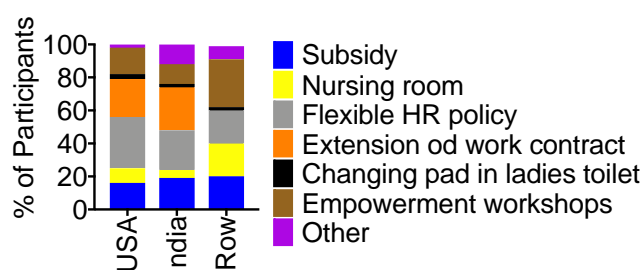


Figure 4b: Types of child care options available to participants across the globe.

- iii. However, a rather subtle form of bias exists in type of childcare options with ~20% organization offering diaper changing stations in ladies' restrooms only.

Conclusions

The results of the survey are rather disconcerting, with only ~50% survey participants having a semblance of work-life balance. This appears to affect all age groups almost equally and shows that there are inadequate policies in place to allow for a balance between work and personal life. All this agrees with the notion that long and/or unconventional work hours in STEM fields are not ideal for a good work-life balance [13]. This survey also shows that most institutions do not offer adequate maternity/paternity or family leave. This is likely to affect individuals when they become primary care providers to dependents such as children and the elderly.

However, the results of this part of the survey are also somewhat surprising. It appears that women are just as (un)satisfied as men with their workplace policies and how it affects their ability to maintain a work-life balance. This is despite the fact that there exists some form of bias against women in the workplace, whether

explicit or implicit as found in various surveys [14] repeatedly including the other parts of this survey dealing with bias. Is this because women who have managed to remain in their field reconciled with the fact that *this* is the level of support they will get and that they will have to somehow learn to deal with it? A recent survey conducted by the Association for Women in Science (AWIS) seemed to allude to it, where ~61% of the respondents indicated that they have learnt to cope with stress in their workplace [15]. Another confounding factor in this survey is that almost all the participants are actively pursuing a career in the STEM field. It excludes those who have chosen to become stay-at-home parents. So, we cannot comment on why people choose to be stay-at-home parents or accurately assess whether this factors into their (dis)satisfaction with their work-life balance.

Another missing element in the survey is that, we do not know if the participants are primary care givers (to a child, parent or any other dependent). A recent survey [16] reported in the PNAS shows that nearly half of new moms have to give up full time STEM positions due to childbirth and/or adoption. So, what steps can be taken to encourage women to return to the workforce after childcare? Universal maternity leave is only one form of support. It exists for a short window of time immediately following childbirth. More men are also realizing their role in rearing a newborn. If more workplaces began offering paternity leave, it will provide the mother help to shoulder the responsibility of raising a newborn. This in turn is likely to encourage her to return to work. Additionally, organizations such as the Wellcome Trust offer fellowships for women who are returning to work after a break for childcare [17]. However, these fellowships are highly competitive and limited. So more such fellowship opportunities might be beneficial. Further to parental leave, there needs to exist a viable support system that allows mothers to return to and stay at work. This means the availability of affordable childcare options. Upon returning to work, only about 20% of women had access to a nursing room to pump breast milk (Figure 4b, 31% in the U.S.A., 13% in India and 11% in RoW). In India, nursing rooms for new mothers are rarely available and there are few laws that legally require employers to provide nursing stations [18]. US federal law requires all employers with more than 50 employees to provide nursing mothers with a reasonable break time and a nursing room [19].

While more than 90% of survey participants from the USA work in places that have more than 50 employees (universities and research institutes), only about 10% of the people said that they have access to nursing rooms. So, even where laws exist, they aren't being implemented.

Work-life balance is vital to retain and recruit more women in STEM fields [20]. Previous studies indicate that flexible and/or remote work hours coupled with additional leaves (for family etc.) are important parameters to consider addressing this issue. Irrespective of whether women have adapted to the existing support systems and learned to make the most of it, our data suggest that there is still much room for improvement especially in academia and non-profit organizations.

As observed in this survey, work-life balance is not a trivial issue that can be resolved with binary solutions. There are several deep-rooted traditions, practices and work-cultures that will require breaking; stereotypical "norms" of what is considered a "good trainee" or "good employee" will need to be reevaluated. Perhaps one of the reasons for the lack of support is a lack of accountability for unfair and poor treatment of trainees/employees. Therefore, first the guidelines/expectations for work hours and employment need to be clarified. This should include an effort made by both the employer and employee to actively communicate these expectations to each other without a fear of repercussions from the employer. Many universities require students and postdocs to fill out weekly time sheets indicating whether they took time off that week. Universities must curate these data to see if trainees rarely take any time off, and intervene when appropriate to ensure that supervisors aren't unfairly overworking their trainees. Also, there needs to be an effort made by the employer to provide support resources for childcare, time and financial management workshops that can help the employee attain better work-life balance. Clearly there are some workplaces that are trying to support their employee's holistic life, but there is a long road ahead of us before the philosophy of work-life balance becomes a universal norm.

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CSG-WiS Survey 2018-19

[Part I: An Unequal Support Conundrum](#)

[Part II: Gender Bias: Myth or Fact?](#)

[Part III: Does Every Biased Action Have An Effective Reaction?](#)

[Part IV: Gender Diversity Paradox: Her Leadership Story](#)

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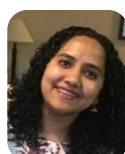
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Thank you to all the participants!

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