Global study into public attitudes to women in leadership roles shows high levels of acceptance of women in science

Thursday 11 February, 2021

The UK and Canada lead the world in attitudes towards equality in leadership in science

COVID-19 has demonstrated the critical role of women scientists in the fight against the pandemic, but participation, pay and airtime has not kept pace with attitudes

11 February, London: A major study measuring the extent to which society is comfortable with women in leadership positions, as compared to men, reveals high levels of acceptance of women in science.

The Reykjavik Index, which measures perceptions towards suitability to lead across twenty-three sectors, finds that two scientific sectors, Natural Sciences and Pharmaceutical and Medical Research, have some of the highest average Index scores at the G7 level (81 and 80 out of 100 respectively, with any score less than a 100 showing an indication of prejudice against women).

But while public perceptions of equality in leadership in these sectors are encouraging, it is not translating into participation and inclusion of women in the highest positions in these sectors. Research from UNESCO[i] shows that **less than 30% of the world's scientific researchers are women**, that they publish.

As the scientific response to COVID-19 shapes the impact of the pandemic, there has been a spotlight on women behind the vaccine: **Prof Sarah Gilbert**, the woman who designed the Oxford vaccine, **Özlem Türeci**, Co-Founder and Chief Medical Officer of BioNTech and World Health Organisation's chief scientist, **Soumya Swaminathan**.

In the **UK**, 17 of the approximately 55 members of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) are women[ii], but in **Italy**, where COVID-19 had an early and devastating impact, leading female scientists demanded that they be included in the national response. Initially, there were no women on Italy's 20-member technical scientific committee Comitato Tecnico Scientifico (CTS)[iii] – a group of experts advising the government during the coronavirus outbreak. However, after public criticism, six women have joined the committee. In the **US**, only two women are on The White House Coronavirus Task Force[iv] of 27 people.

Female voices have been remarkably absent in news reporting of the pandemic, according research from the International Women's Media Foundation[v], with a substantial bias towards men's perspectives in both newsgathering and news coverage of the pandemic, spanning across all regions. Within scientific expert commentary in global news coverage men were quoted between 2.9 (UK) and 5.1 (India) times more frequently than women in COVID-19/coronavirus stories in the six analysed countries. 60% of medical doctors quoted were men, in comparison to 21% women, and in academia 75% were men, with 22% of women quoted.

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Kantar's research looked at perceived suitability of women in leadership positions from a sector perspective and found that **Natural Sciences** and **Pharmaceutical and Medical Research** are those with the highest average G7 Index scores.

Both women and men continue to demonstrate some prejudice against women in these subsectors. The average G7 score for **Pharmaceutical and Medical Research** is 76 for men, with women scoring 83. For Natural Sciences scores for women are 84 and for men 78, any efforts to counter this will need to account for the higher amounts of prejudice demonstrated by men.

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Notes to Editors

The Reykjavik Index:

Related Sectors:

Charities & non-profits :: Children & Teenagers :: Education & Human Resources :: Environment & Nature :: Medical & Pharmaceutical ::

Related Keywords:

Women :: Gender :: Science :: Equality :: Covid-19 :: Coronavirus ::

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1. **2020/2021 Reykjavik Index scores for Pharmaceutical and Medical Research by country**

UK, Canada and USA have high index scores for this sector, meaning majority of people think that women and men are equally suitable to lead.

Index scores by country, average, men and women

Sweden 87 higher for women

87 average

UK 86

Canada 86

USA 86

France 79

Japan 74

Germany 69

Italy 68

India 78

Kenya 68

Nigeria

-more-

1. **Reykjavik Index scores for Natural Sciences**

The Reykjavik Index scores for Natural Sciences are **high for UK, Canada and USA**, with relatively small dissonance gaps, however there are significant gaps between scores for women and men in **Italy.**

Index scores by country, average, men and women

women

average

UK

Canada

USA

France

Japan

Germany

Italy

India

63 Kenya

54 Nigeria

About Women Political Leaders

Women Political Leaders (WPL) is the global network of female politicians. The mission of WPL is to increase both the number and the influence of women in political leadership positions. WPL members are women in political office – Presidents, Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliaments. Membership is free and members are honoured by their participation. WPL strives in all its activities to demonstrate the impact of more women in political leadership, for the global better. https://www.womenpoliticalleaders.org/about/

About the Reykjavík Global Forum - Women Leaders

The Reykjavík Global Forum - Women Leaders is where women leaders discuss and share ideas and solutions on how to further advance society. The inaugural Forum was launched in November 2018, in Reykjavík, Iceland, as the Women Leaders Global Forum. The Forum is annually co-hosted by Women Political Leaders (WPL), and the Government and Parliament of Iceland, under the heading Power, Together. The Forum's mission is to provide a platform where women leaders discuss and share ideas and solutions on how to further advance society, increase gender equality and promote and positively develop the number of women in leadership positions. The Forum features keynote speakers, all internationally recognised for their contribution to advancing society and gathers more than 450 invitation-only Conversationists from all over the world. For further information, please visit: https://womenleaders.global/

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[i] https://en.unesco.org/news/just-30-world's-researchers-are-women-whats-situation-your-country

[ii] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scientific-advisory-group-for-emergencies-sage-coronavirus-covid-19-response-membership/list-of-participants-of-sage-and-related-sub-groups

[iii] https://www.iwmf.org/women-in-covid19-news/

[iv] https://www.dhs.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus-news-updates

[v] https://www.iwmf.org/women-in-covid19-news/

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