

Six Russian women on Wednesday clambered into a mock spaceship to begin a unique experiment testing how an all-female crew would interact on a trip to the Moon and back.

For eight days, the female volunteers will live inside a wood-panelled suite of rooms at Moscow's Institute of Biomedical Problems, renowned for its wacky research into the psychological and physical effects of [space travel](#).

The institute in 2010 locked six male international volunteers in an isolation experiment lasting 520 days, to simulate a flight to Mars and back.

"Such a crew is taking part for the first time in a simulation experiment. It's interesting for us to see what is special about the way a female crew communicates," said Sergei Ponomaryov, the experiment's supervisor.

"It will be particularly interesting in terms of psychology," said the institute's director Igor Ushakov.

"I'd like to wish you a lack of conflicts, even though they say that in one kitchen, two housewives find it hard to live together," he added.

The volunteers include scientific researchers, a doctor and a psychologist.

The test period simulates a flight to the Moon and back, with the [women](#) carrying out 10 experiments covering psychology and human biology.

Russia sent the first woman into [space](#), Valentina Tereshkova, in 1963 but has lagged behind since. Last year it sent its fourth female cosmonaut into space, Yelena Serova.

Serova complained of a flurry of media interest in how she would wash her hair aboard the International Space Station, pointing out that male cosmonauts did not face the same line of questioning.

Ponomaryov called the latest experiment an effort to make up for lost time.

"There's never been an all-female crew on the ISS. We consider the future of space belongs equally to men and women and unfortunately we need to catch up a bit after a period when unfortunately there haven't been too many women in space."

'Beautiful without makeup'

Despite the mission being presented as a giant step for gender equality, the women—who wore red jumpsuits—found themselves fielding questions at a press conference about how they would cope without men or makeup for eight days.

"We are very beautiful without makeup," parried participant Darya Komissarova.

Her colleague Anna Kussmaul was more direct: "We are doing work. When you're doing your work, you don't think about men and women."

Like their counterparts on the International Space Station the women will have no shower, washing with wet wipes instead.

They plan to spend their 1 1/2 hours per day of free time watching films, reading and playing board games.

Team leader Yelena Luchnitskaya said she expected the women to deal with any conflict.

"I'm sure we all have the education, personal qualities and the upbringing, at the end of the day," she said.

"So far I can't imagine what would rattle us."

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