

# The 'glass obstacle course' facing women in marine science

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Major change is needed to counteract the lack of gender equality in

marine science, according to new research from The Australian National University (ANU).

The study's authors say it is not only a problem of diversity, but a barrier to achieving our global ocean sustainability goals.

The [research](#) collated data from 34 women leaders across 27 countries, highlighting not only the gendered barriers to women's leadership, but the concrete actions that could help overcome them.

"To solve the biggest problems facing our oceans, we need to bring together diverse people from a range of different disciplines," lead researcher Dr. Rebecca Shellock from ANU said.

"Having women leaders is important, as with diversity comes new ideas, new opinions and innovation. Without women and other minority groups, we lack all of that."

The research found that 70 percent of the research participants perceived that from their own experience, interdisciplinary [marine research](#) was more challenging for women leaders than their male counterparts.

This is due to a range of social barriers including isolation, underrepresentation and stereotyping.

"Our women leaders said that these barriers affected their mental well-being, job satisfaction, and their success and career progression," Dr. Shellock said.

"All of these together form a glass obstacle course, where the gendered processes create hurdles and barriers for [women scientists](#) to constantly dodge."

Professor Gretta Pecl, Director of the Centre for Marine Socioecology at the University of Tasmania, was one of the [women leaders](#) in marine research interviewed for the paper.

"When it comes to [interdisciplinary research](#), collaborative and consultative leadership is often the most effective," Professor Pecl said.

"It isn't always the case, but the skills of listening, creativity and innovation can lend themselves to leadership styles more common amongst women," Professor Pecl said.

The research identified several actions suggested by current leaders to support and promote more women into leadership positions.

This included creating family-friendly environments at [academic institutions](#), informal networking opportunities, and support and engagement from superiors and peers.

"We need to make changes in the way both women and men work, not just women. This involves institutional reforms such as changing the culture of academia, improving [parental leave](#) and adopting flexible working practices," Dr. Sherlock said.

"Hopefully this paper can provide a roadmap for both institutions and the [scientific community](#), allowing them to think about what kind of strategies they can use to promote and support women's leadership."

"Ultimately, this is not a woman's problem, it's everyone's responsibility within society to make this change."

"We are at a crucial point where we are facing some of the biggest issues such as climate change and food security. We need women in leadership positions more than ever before."

The research was published in *One Earth*.

**More information:** Rebecca Shellock, Breaking down barriers: The identification of actions to promote gender equality in interdisciplinary marine research institutions, *One Earth* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.oneear.2022.05.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2022.05.006). [www.cell.com/one-earth/fulltex ... 2590-3322\(22\)00261-5](https://www.cell.com/one-earth/fulltext/S2590-3322(22)00261-5)

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