

Women achieving greater professional recognition in scientific fields, study finds

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Right now in the most important societies in the world of Economics, female academics have a greater chance of being recognized compared with men.

Credit: UPV/EHU

Using the Econometric Society and other international societies as the basis for their research, the group of researchers comprising Nagore

Iriberry, David Card, Stefano DellaVigna and Patricia Funk explored the gender impact when recognizing excellence in contributions by their colleagues and peers. In other words, their study constituted a recognition process in which scientists in a field of knowledge assess the quality of the contributions of their professional colleagues.

Recognized by these scientific institutions, they represent the elite and are regarded as an important reference in each of their fields, in this case economics. Have female researchers enjoyed the same recognition as their [male counterparts](#) for their scientific contributions?

The research concludes that right now in the most important societies in the field of economics, female academics have a greater chance of being recognized compared with men. "Three reasons may account for this phenomenon. Firstly, male academics have become aware of the barriers that women scientists have faced throughout history and are trying to turn the process around. Secondly, they may believe that equal representation constitutes an added value. Thirdly, the world of science has realized that, although everyone is assumed to enjoy the same opportunities, women have a harder time," explained Nagore Iriberry.

This project was carried out by means of a database that was used to compile and compare the profiles of female and male scientists in the main scientific societies, such as the Econometric Society (EC), the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS), the American Economic Association (AEA), the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the Sloan Foundation (a foundation that supports high quality [scientific research](#)). The thousands of [data points](#) published on the website of each of these societies and associations, from their inception to the present day, were used to compile this database.

A database of all the researchers who have been eligible for this type of recognition was also created, taking into account the papers published

and the citations received by all of them. By creating profiles with similar characteristics it was also possible to compare them with each other and determine the influence of gender on the likelihood of being nominated or chosen for this type of recognition.

Based on the results, the researchers concluded that "gender exerts an influence on the probability of being nominated and/or chosen for this recognition. That being the case, the recognition gained by women academics has gradually varied over recent decades."

In the early years of the Econometric Society, between 1933 and 1979, a "negative coefficient for women academics" was observed in the likelihood of being chosen for this type of recognition. However, "in the 1980s and 1990s, a small positive effect was detected" with respect to the probability of women being chosen, but it was statistically insignificant. From 2000 to 2009, a "moderate positive effect" on the probability of being chosen can be seen. "Finally, between 2010 and 2019, a more significant positive effect than in the previous years can be detected."

In the AAAS and NAS, whose election system is based on academics directly nominating their peers, a very similar development can be observed throughout their history as far as the presence of women is concerned. However, the AEA and the Sloan Foundation, whose nomination systems are committee-based, showed a more constant development over time.

So a pronounced shift from a negative rate to a positive rate can be seen over the last decade in terms of the probability of being recognized by these institutions.

"I believe that the percentage of women in this field will eventually become similar to that of men, but for this to happen, we have to work,

not only in science, but in [society](#) in general, to promote equal distribution right from a young age," said Iriberry.

The importance of geographical diversity

The research also revealed a parallel effect in the influence of geographic diversity. In the 1990s, the nominees tended to be economists from renowned U.S. universities.

Today, an individual is three times more likely to be elected when they are part of an underrepresented region. Within this shift, the importance of the role of the committee is evident, as it has been making changes to the election ballots to emphasize the role of these regions.

The study is published in *Econometrica*.

More information: David Card et al, Gender Differences in Peer Recognition by Economists, *Econometrica* (2022). [DOI: 10.3982/ECTA18027](#)

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