

Women scientists soar high in In-silico research

08 March 2021 | Views

The Indian state governments should take proactive initiatives in encouraging life science companies to establish offices in two-tier cities to enable more and more women to shape their careers in this field.



The trajectory of life science industry has changed considerably in the last few years with significant contributions to the Indian economy and healthcare. The boom continues to provide numerous employment opportunities to pharma and life sciences graduates, in fact, it offers women-dominated career options like medical writing, pharmacovigilance, programming, and bioinformatics. Organisations that provide life sciences related 'desk jobs' house more than 50 per cent women, while on the other hand, the percentage of women workforce is around 10 per cent or less in labs and pharma sales.

A survey conducted in 2018 on women in STEM and non-STEM jobs found that 45 per cent of the women respondents working in STEM jobs were dissatisfied with their current career choice, 46 per cent cited the need for constantly updating their skills in STEM careers. 39 per cent were unable to adjust to the long hours and commitment needed in these jobs and 36 per cent were apprehensive of working in a male-dominated office environment. Lastly, 24 per cent complained that women were less likely to be paid as much as men in these high-profile occupations.

This is where life science companies that provide In-silico research services can play a crucial role. The women employees in such companies have been able to contribute to important researches in India and globally without being required to venture into the wet labs. However, despite the positive trends, the representation of women when it comes to figures, is comparatively low in the industry. Women though often being more educated than their spouses are still more representative in fields such as humanities and social sciences.

Challenges

Striking a work-life balance and climbing the career ladder to C-suite positions is a universal challenge women face. Although women enter the industry in equal proportion to men, by the time they become team leaders and managers, they start prioritising family and children and their careers take a setback. A few who manage to reach the leadership position, find it difficult to hit the glass ceiling.

Professional entry to organisations in life science services is another issue that many women face. This is especially true for women hailing from two-tier cities. To address the issue, companies can open offices across India wherein they can tie up with institutions and even influencing the curriculum. It is time organisations look at two-tier cities and the rich talent pool housing in these cities.

The scenario outside India

The scenario is no different outside of India, although the figures may be slightly better when compared to India. The challenges across the world are universal, with a few demographic and cultural differences. Moreover, today no country is different, technology has blurred the borders.

What needs to be done

The Indian state governments should take proactive initiatives in encouraging life science companies to establish offices in two-tier cities to enable more and more women to shape their careers in this field.

Organisations have to give priority to providing options for work-life balance, now more so, with work from home creating a thin line of difference between personal and professional life. We need to look at measures like flexible work hours, remote work options, and study assistance to encourage women to pursue challenging career opportunities and climb the corporate ladder. Last but not the least, organisations have to actively drive diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Krishna K, Director - Sales & Marketing, Molecular Connections, Bengaluru