



Science Needs Women and Girls in STEM: International Day of Women and Girls in Science

By Madyn Bourque

Now, more than ever, the world needs all scientists and researchers of diverse and varied backgrounds to aid in the fight against COVID-19. In such a vital time where science is pushing boundaries and rapidly evolving to meet circumstances, you would think that equal numbers of women and men would be at the forefront of the movement. While there have been significant improvements in respect to gender equality in the STEM workforce over the past few months and years, it still yields disappointing figures when compared to desired numbers.

Less than 30% of researchers worldwide are women. That's a staggering statistic considering women make up slightly more than half of the world's population. Furthermore, only 35% of those studying in STEM programs are women. There are a variety of explanations as to why this is: inherent assumptions that girls won't do well in science, less mentors and role models, hostility from others regarding their 'unnatural' choice of career path, just to name a few. Even if they persevere through their schooling, the workplace isn't always kind. Some barriers include unequal pay, glass ceilings (an inability to progress or be promoted beyond a certain point), and a lack of reliable policies to ensure job security in times of pregnancy leave or other life events. Most, if not all, of these barriers are nonexistent to white men.

So, what can we do about it? While we can't just will gender equality into existence (though I so wish we could), an effective way to get started is raising awareness and celebrating women in STEM. The International Day of Women and Girls in Science was introduced by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 to ensure equal participation of women across STEM fields and to empower them to pursue their scientific ambitions. The day has been designated as February 11th and embraces a theme each year. Last year's theme was 'Investment in Women and Girls in Science for Inclusive Green Growth' and aimed to draw attention to the reality that both women in science *and* gender equality are necessary if the world intends to meet any internationally agreed developmental goals (an example would be the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). The theme for 2021 has yet to be announced.

There are a variety of ways you can celebrate International Day of Women and Girls in Science safely this year. Spend some time researching a woman's scientific achievements on Google (easily done from the comfort of your couch) or sit down with some of the young girls in your life and chat with them about their ambitions. Encourage them to pursue STEM and make them aware that it's possible for them to succeed in the field. You can also

engage with different at-home STEM activities (a nice collection can be viewed at <http://wiseatlantic.ca/resources/>). However you chose to celebrate, be sure to have fun with it, and know that you're empowering the women in your life and helping create an increasingly gender equal world.

Sources:

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