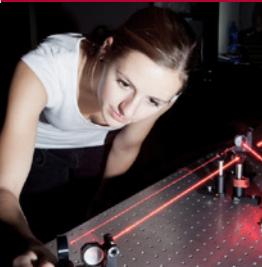


THE DANISH NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION GETTING ALL TALENTS IN PLAY



COMMENTS FROM THE DNRF CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE ON THE GENDER IMBALANCE

The DNRF initiated an analysis of the unsatisfactory utilization of talent that arises from the gender imbalance by including this issue as a specific topic for discussion at the annual follow-up meetings with the DNRF Centers of Excellence (dg.dk/centers-of-excellence) in the fall of 2013 and the spring of 2014.

Here is what the centers' researchers agreed and disagreed on when discussing the need to realize the full potential of all people:

Agreement

- Mentor programs for advice and inspiration are beneficial to maintain interest and dedication
- Long-term and clear career paths, including tenure track positions, are needed
- More flexibility regarding stays abroad is needed - and spouse job, relocation and childcare is needed
- Maternity leave is an extra expense for employers and a source of discrimination against women. Therefore more flexibility regarding parental leave is needed
- Publishing criteria need to be adjusted after number of children when hiring for academic positions

For discussion

- Special programmes for women in research like the YDUN program
- Special child care facilities in the workplace

Data on the distribution of female and male researchers at the DNRF Centers of Excellences suggest that leadership is an important but not sufficient consideration when seeking to improve the gender balance.

Structural changes in the way we organize research need to be addressed in order to get all research talents in play.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE GENDER IMBALANCE

When the Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF) was assessed in 2013, the international evaluation panel noted that the gender balance among center leaders and senior researchers at the Centers of Excellence was less than satisfactory, although it is similar to the situation in research in Denmark over all. For that reason, the panel recommended that the DNRF, the center leaders, and the universities take active steps, such as developing a pipeline for future female leaders, to address the challenges of the gender imbalance. We therefore initiated this discussion with our researchers in our Centers of Excellence

The DNRF's mission is to support excellent research and in this regard, our primary interest is to gain knowledge on how we can utilize all talents in research - to strengthen the research quality.

The challenge of the gender imbalance in research is not only about getting more women to stay in research. It's about getting the best talents for research.

THE GENDER IMBALANCE AT THE DNRF CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

When we compare Denmark to the surrounding countries, all countries share an unequal gender balance in research that progresses with seniority. However, the inequality is more pronounced in Denmark from the postgraduate level through the post-doctoral, associate professor and full professor levels (Figure 1).

The DNRF's Centers of Excellence are not exempt from this imbalance (Figure 2A). In total, 32 percent of the centers' staffs in 2012 were women. Having female research leaders increases the number of female researchers to 55 percent on average compared to 29 percent at centers with male leaders (Figure 2B). However, this doesn't change the rate at which women drop out in the transition from Ph.D. students to faculty positions (Figure 2C). This suggests that leadership is an important but not sufficient consideration if we want to improve the gender balance. Structural changes in the way we organize research also need to be addressed in order to realize the full potential of all people.

FIGURE 1
GENDER DISTRIBUTION

— Male national
— Female national

Proportion of women and men at various rungs of the academic ladder in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland in 2012.

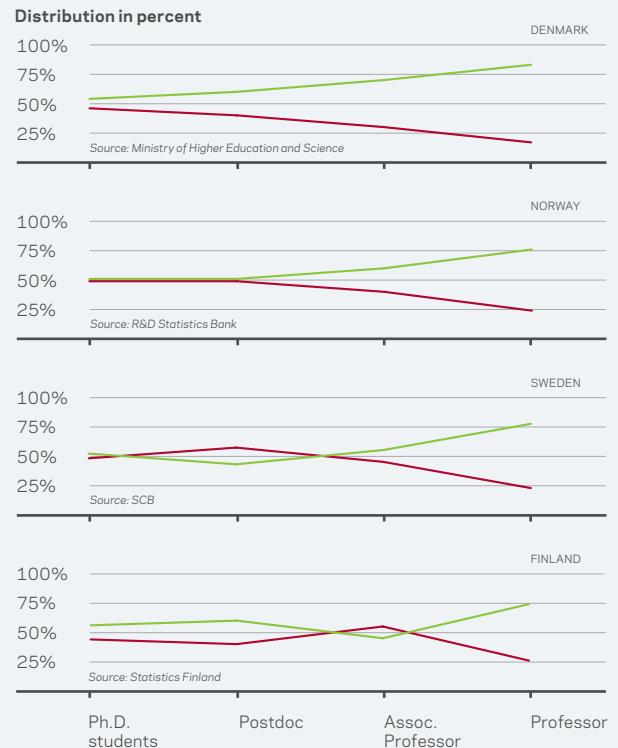


FIGURE 2A
GENDER DISTRIBUTION AT CoEs AND NATIONALLY

Male at CoE Female national
Male national Female at CoE

Gender distribution at the DNRf's Centers of Excellence compared to national distribution in 2012.

Distribution in percent

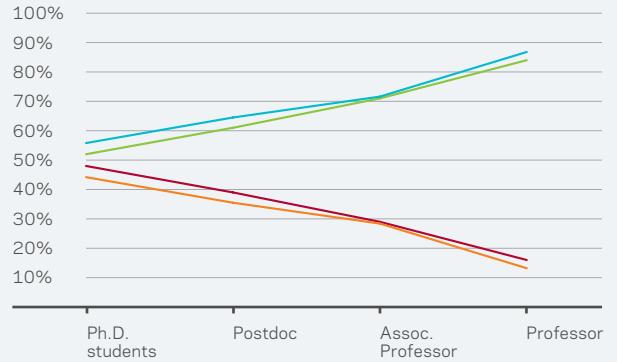


FIGURE 2B
GENDER DISTRIBUTION BY LEADER'S GENDER

Female
Male

Distribution of males and females at DNRf's CoE when headed by a female researcher (left), male researcher (middle) and in total (right): In total, 32 percent of the centers' staffs were women which suggests that having female research leaders increases the number of female researchers on average.

Distribution in percent

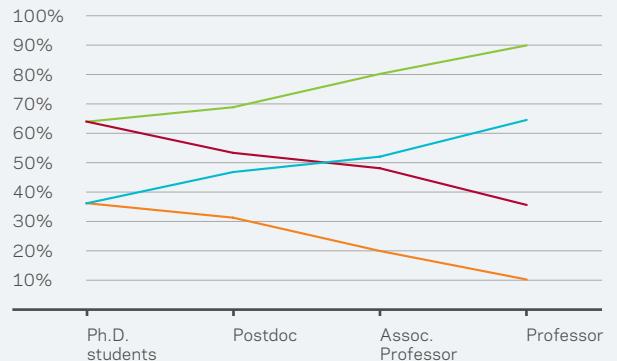


FIGURE 2C
GENDER DISTRIBUTION BY LEADER'S GENDER AND EMPLOYEE'S ACADEMIC DEGREE

Male at CoE (Male leader)
Male at CoE (Female leader)
Female at CoE (Female leader)
Female at CoE (Male leader)

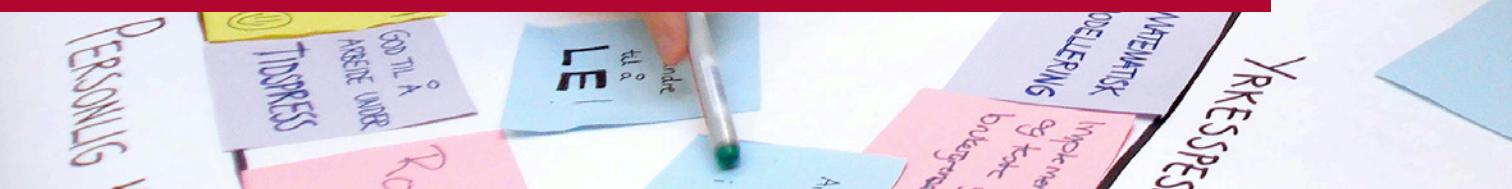
The proportion of women and men at various rungs of the academic ladder at CoEs with female and male leaders respectively.

Distribution in percent





Bringing all talents in play is crucial when we want to design quality research questions. DNRF asked the researchers at our Centers of Excellence “Is there a problem?” and “What can we do about it?”





ACTIVE MEASURES

During 2013/2014 the DNRF initiated an analysis of the gender imbalance by including this issue as a specific topic at the annual follow-up meetings with the DNRF CoEs (dg.dk/centers-of-excellence). Center staff and the DNRF's chair, director, and board members participated in the meetings, which took place at the centers.

Approximately 500 female and 100 male researchers and other staff from the centers were invited to discuss two main questions: "Is there a problem?" and "If yes, what can be done about it?".

The feedback was diverse and, at times, even contradictory. Some of the comments and suggestions were directed at the political system, others at university leadership, and yet others at the research community at large. The following projection of the feedback from the DNRF Centers of Excellence is divided into three categories depending on the audience to which the recommendations or comments are directed.

DIRECTED TO THE LEGISLATURE

The babies

A powerful factor behind the female dropout rate in the transition from Ph.D. student to faculty positions is children. Starting a career often coincides with starting a family, and this creates barriers on several levels. First, having employees on maternity and paternity leave may create extra expense for employers. Since women take more time off for leave than men, this could be a source of discrimination against women. At many centers, it was recommended that the disfavor shown to both women and men on maternity and paternity leave be removed, e.g., by creating a fully reimbursed childbirth accommodation fund for academia, or by equal sharing of leave between mother and father.

Second, Danish rules for maternity/paternity leave do not allow the researcher to work, take courses, or attend workshops, during the period of leave. This excludes the parent from the research environment to an extent that is not desirable neither for the parent nor the research group. To alleviate this problem, some suggested a legislative regulation of shared maternity/paternity leave, optional maternity leave after the first three months, or part-time maternity leave. Another suggestion was that people on leave should be allowed to do research and even have possibilities for babysitting, in order to have time to write articles.

When center researchers were asked if a 12-month maternity leave is necessary, there was a strong consensus that taking the full 12-month leave must be an individual decision. Likewise, there was a strong consensus that legislative initiatives on this matter need to go hand in hand with clear strategies from university leadership to support the balance between starting research careers and starting families.

Initiatives targeted at women

The younger researchers at the centers seem to be divided into two groups on the topic of special initiatives for female researchers such as the FREJA program (the Danish Research Councils), the Minerva program at the Max Planck Society, or the YDUN program recently initiated by the Danish Council for Independent Research. Many of the younger researchers are against such initiatives, worrying that such programs would mark them as second-rate researchers. Others argued that special initiatives are needed to attract more female researchers to faculty positions. One center leader noted that it doesn't matter how you are hired if you do your job well.

DIRECTED TO THE UNIVERSITIES

Mentor programs and clear strategies

Feedback from the centers unanimously states that mentoring is of great value. It can play an important role in strengthening the future career paths of young scientists and is recommended for both female and male scientists. Furthermore, mentor programs may help accelerate an open debate in the research societies in general as well as internal discussions in the specific research environments about the barriers to getting all talents in play. In this way, mentor programs can help facilitate structural changes in the way we organize research.

Many researchers requested clear strategies to ensure the continuity of research and research careers in connection with parental leave, e.g., having access to child care facilities or having the opportunity to bring publishing up to speed after maternity and paternity leave. A grant after maternity leave in order to have time for writing and publishing results could be of great value, as could a reduction in teaching responsibilities immediately after the leave and lab technician assistance during and after the leave. Mentors or senior role models are important assets in implementing such strategies.

Staying abroad

The opportunity or requirement to go abroad during the Ph.D. and post-doctoral years often coincides with the child-bearing years, and to many young researchers, family stability and career security are key concerns when children are small.

On top of this, long stays abroad are expensive for young families with children, since day care in foreign countries is expensive and families often have to get by on one income.

Another challenge is the negative effect the requirement of a stay abroad can have on a spouse's career. Suggestions to alleviate these obstacles for dual career couples include splitting the stays abroad into several shorter periods, offering financial support to defray the extra cost of travel and living abroad with children, and, if possible, offering the spouse career opportunities.

Better career safety

In order to get women to stay in research, universities need to create clear and long-term career paths. Tenure track positions are one suggestion often mentioned when debating the topic of gender imbalance. Adjusting the hiring criteria could be another way to go about it. One center leader pointed out that getting the top-ranked applicant doesn't guarantee that the applicant will produce the best science or have the highest impact on his or her field of research. Instead, he suggested using profiles of excellence as hiring criteria, that is, weighing in other factors such as supervision, teaching, and mentoring – or simply the criterion of diversity – when hiring.

DIRECTED TO THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Publishing requirements and criteria

Scientific publishing is key to funding and career advancement. The current publishing requirements and criteria put women at a relative disadvantage in two regards: First, they publish less because of children. Second, the most prestigious journals favor traditionally male-dominated fields. A change in requirements, alertness to new research fields and criteria was mentioned as possible ways to improve the situation. The dilemma here is to do so while not compromising excellence.

Difference in mentality

At the meetings, men and women spoke openly about a difference in mentality between men and women regarding their approach to research. At most of the centers researchers agreed that, generally speaking, some women are less competitive than men. It was pointed out by some that to be successful in research women – to a certain extent – have to adopt a male attitude.

This difference in mentality may constitute a barrier to the utilization of all talent, partly because competitive behavior is rewarded with grants and positions, and it may be one of the reasons why some women choose other career paths. Embracing diversity is necessary if we want to utilize all talents in research.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE DNRf

Clearly, excellent research is and should be competitive. The question is: Does the research community at large include all relevant factors in the competition for grants and positions? Or could we broaden the perspective in order to utilize all talents in all its diversity in a more effective way? Utilizing all talents is needed, again with the aim for the DNRf to secure the very best research in our Centers of Excellence.

The DNRf will continue to address the issue, as it is essential to increase awareness of the gender issue in research. The topic is clearly a very sensitive one, and the main conclusion is that there are no black-and-white answers or quick fixes, and opinions vary. The DNRf will share the observations we made at the annual follow-up meetings and encourage key stakeholders to include the valuable comments and suggestions from the centers in their future initiatives on the issue of gender and diversity in research.

Monitor the gender balance at the centers

The DNRf will continue to challenge the center leaders in regard to their gender and diversity policies and encourage them to take action to improve the balance.

Statistics on the gender balance at each center will be given in the centers' annual reports, and the foundation will track developments on the gender issue at each center from one year to the next.

Work toward designing a targeted funding mechanism

Research councils and foundations are essential to the implementation of research policies. The DNRf is currently debating how it can improve diversity without impeding excellence. Mentor programs and leadership development programs that target younger female researchers are among the ideas the foundation is considering. Another idea is a targeted gender and diversity program inspired by the DNRf's Niels Bohr professorships.



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