

## Results from a survey within NCCR 'Plant Survival': Career advancement and equal opportunities

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### Introduction

During the winter of 2001/2002, a survey was conducted among NCCR Plant Survival PhD students and postdocs. The goal of this survey was to learn about their professional and personal situation as well as their particular needs in terms of career advancement in order to implement the appropriate measures. The following is a summary of the obtained results. **The full file can be accessed at the NCCR Plant Survival Equal Opportunities office.**

#### 1. Good response and great interest from both genders

The survey was distributed to 74 people (PhD students/postdocs), comprised of 28 women and 46 men. Overall, the response was good with 60% of all surveys being returned. Women's participation was greater amounting to 70%, however, men also showed a substantial interest with 52% returned surveys.

#### 2. Personal and professional background

##### ***Balanced age structure***

The majority of women (65%) and men (54%) were between 25-30 years old, followed by the 31-35 years (15% women, 13% men) and 36-40 years (10% women, 17% men). Fewer respondents were under 25 or over 40 years (total 11%).

##### ***Few children, few mothers***

The vast majority of all respondents did not have any children with 90% of all women and 75% of all men. The majority of all children was in the youngest category (0-4 years), followed by 3 children between 5-9 years and 1 child over 10 years. Overall, only 2 women were mothers, whereas 6 men were fathers. Only three respondents had more than one child. None of the respondents were single parents.

#### 3. Education and professional situation

##### ***Diverse motivation for research career with minor differences between genders***

The most often cited reasons why a career in research was started were: interest in biology/nature (35% women, 29% men), thirst for knowledge (25% women, 21% men), intellectual challenge/stimulation (10% women, 25% men), encouragement from friends/family (25% women, 13% men), and an always present desire to do research (15% women, 13% men). Others such as enhanced career opportunities, good marks in science, prestige, independent working, or lack of alternatives were less frequent.

##### ***Few gender related incentives and obstacles***

On the way towards scientific research, gender related incentives were experienced only sporadically (total 5%), whereas obstacles were cited three times as much (16%). Gender related obstacles experienced by women were: male dominated science and lack of time to read at home due to family obligations. In contrast, men

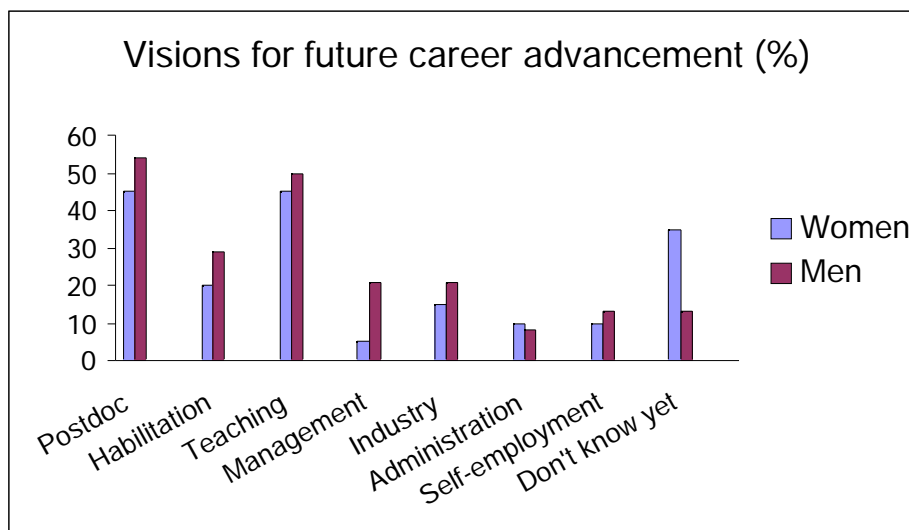
stated: preference of supervisors to help women, more opportunities for women, and lost time due to military service.

**Mostly satisfied with career development**

Seventy percent of all women and 63% of all men believed that the present position reflected their original career plan. In addition to the 15% women and 33% men that recognised a difference between original plan and present status, more than three times more women (15%) compared with men (4%) were unsure about this question. The potential reasons for a delay or change in career plans were similarly cited between genders and included family planning, lack of money, competitive pressure, and insufficient support from supervisor.

**Academic career advancement preferred, more undecided women**

The expectations for the future career advancement were mostly of academic nature, with slightly higher ratios for men, including a postdoctoral position (45% women, 63% men), teaching (45% women, 50% men), and habilitation (20% women, 29% men). Less frequent possibilities included management, self-employment, industry, and administration. More than a third of all women (35%) but relatively few men (13%) did not know where to go from their present position.



**Insecure job market the most limiting factor to continue in science**

Most respondents considered to continue a scientific career if job security could be obtained (65% women, 54% men) or with better recruiting possibilities (20% women, 38% men). Other favouring circumstances included better salary (25% women, 29% men), support from the partner (15% women, 13% men), and assistance in management of work load (10% women, 17% men). Less frequently cited factors were the opportunity to work in an interesting position and family compatibility.

**NCCR Plant Survival: networking, diversification and excellence**

The vast majority of respondents (75% women and 50% men) expected from their participation at Plant Survival's Graduate School the establishment of networks.

Obtaining diversified skills was also a frequent expectation (65% women and 54% men), followed by excellence in research (45% women, 58% men), enhanced mobility (25% women, 21% men), and advancement of women (10% women).

#### 4. Professional and private life

##### ***Both genders fear conflicts between professional and private life***

More than two-thirds of all respondents (71%) foresaw conflicts between professional and private life, independent of gender. The prime reason being family planning was equally important for women and men (total 39%). Other factors were more variable including lack of time for leisure, friends etc., which was more important for women (35%) compared with men (21%), and lack of mobility, where only half of the women (15%) compared with men (33%) foresaw a potential problem. Conflicts between research career and partnership were similarly cited by women and men (total 23%).

##### ***Part-time work to overcome conflicts***

The possibility of part-time work was by far the most favoured measure to overcome conflicts between professional and private life (60% women, 67% men). Other measures were generally more preferred by women including maternity/paternity leave (40% women, 25% men), access to University day care (45% women, 17% men), support from partner/family (40% women, 21% men), hired assistance for research (30% women, 17% men), and visibility of parents as researchers (15% women, 13% men). Very few respondents thought that increased mentoring or a laundry facility at work would be helpful.

