

# **A sweet symposium: Ten years of advocating for early career women in the fields of evolution and ecology in Canada (poster abstract)**

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**Summary** Here we present a summary of the challenges and needs of early career women scientists in Canada, as identified through a decade of running a symposium that engages with, and supports, this important demographic of young researchers. Our event, the ‘Symposium for Women Entering Ecology and Evolution Today (SWEEET)’, has been held over the past ten years in association with the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution (CSEE) annual meetings.

## **1. Relevance**

Women are under-represented in positions in the biological sciences in Canada, especially relative to the proportion that successfully complete doctoral and post-doctoral work. For ten years, we have been exploring the underlying reasons for this under-representation, in the context of discussions among participants, panellists, and experts at a symposium for the advancement of early career women. Our observations, both from the organizational perspective, but also from that of our participants, are of extreme importance to understanding and engaging with this issue.

## **2. Aims & Objectives**

The goal of our symposium is to offer career advice, community, networking, and other forms of support to early career women. We also gather survey data on the challenges women (and occasionally their male allies) face at early career stages, and how those intersect with gender-specific challenges such as confidence, discrimination, bias and harassment, as well as other issues identified as important by women scientists, such as family and the desire for work-life balance.

## **3. Methods**

We collected information through surveying 40-100 participants at each of five SWEEET symposia. Our analyses compare responses to survey questions about the challenges and needs of early career women in science in Canada through time. We also track the evolution of our symposium in terms of the changing nature of women’s opportunities in scientific careers.

## **4. Results**

The majority of female survey participants in 2017 (>60%) responded that gender bias has negatively impacted their career. Women in postdoctoral programs are considering non-academic career options in greater numbers than women in doctoral programs, with most respondents indicating work-life balance or family reasons for this change. Respondents highlighted improved career counselling, paid parental leave for graduate students, and better work-life balance as key solutions to improving the likelihood that women scientists transition into academic careers. Finally, although infrequently mentioned, sexual harassment and gender stereotyping were emphasized by some respondents as challenges for women pursuing an academic career.

## **5. Conclusions**

Women are not making it into academic positions in biology as often as men, in spite of the fact that they hold 47.3% of doctoral degrees in Canada in the 25-34 year old age range. Over ten years, through discussions, panels, presentations, and surveys, we have tracked the reasons women have for not pursuing academic careers. Our results show that while some issues have shifted over time, many issues remain unchanged, and therefore further work remains to counter the challenges in this complex arena.

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