



7th IUPAP International Conference on Women in Physics

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Variation in the Gender Composition in Tertiary Physics Education of Sri Lankan Universities

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In Sri Lanka the General Certificate of Education-Advanced Level examination is taken by school candidates at the end of Collegiate Level (Grades 12 -13) which is also used as the entrance examination to Sri Lankan state universities. Physics is a compulsory subject for students following the Physical Science stream and they can obtain admission to the Faculties of Engineering and Science. In the Faculties of Science, they have the option to pursue a course leading to a four-year Physics major (B.Sc.) degree or a three-year Bachelor's degree in Physical Science (B.Sc.) with Physics as a subject. The number of Male/Female candidates admitted to Physical Science streams in all the universities were 6023/1807 in 2017, 5787/1772 in 2018 and 5707/1729 in 2019, thus maintaining a ratio of 3.3:1 throughout this period.

Among the Faculty members, a notable difference in the number of female members relative to the male members can be seen in the percentage difference of the permanent teaching staff in all the universities in 2019. In the category of Lecturers (mostly new recruits), there were 41% male and 59% female members. In the middle category of Senior Lecturers (most with PhDs), there were 55 % male and 45% female members. In the category of Professors, there were 67% male and 33% female members. This trend could partly be attributed to the limited time available for research by the female counterparts which could have affected their research based merit promotions to higher grades.

In the Physics Departments of all Sri Lankan universities, currently (2021) there are 86 male and 32 female Faculty members in the permanent cadre and 84% of them hold PhD degrees. The chi square test suggests that ($p=0.633$) the gender is not a factor when obtaining a PhD among the staff in all universities. Furthermore, tests for proportion of males among all staff members suggest that it is approximately 0.659 ($p=0.082$). Since the 95% confidence interval is (0.639, 0.806), we can conclude that there is a high chance of this ratio to be 2:1.